

FLORECITA



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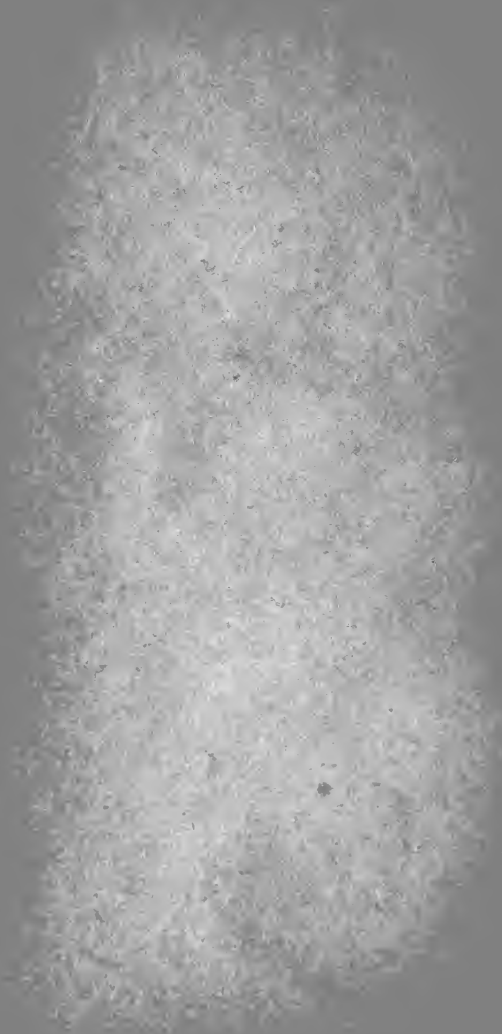
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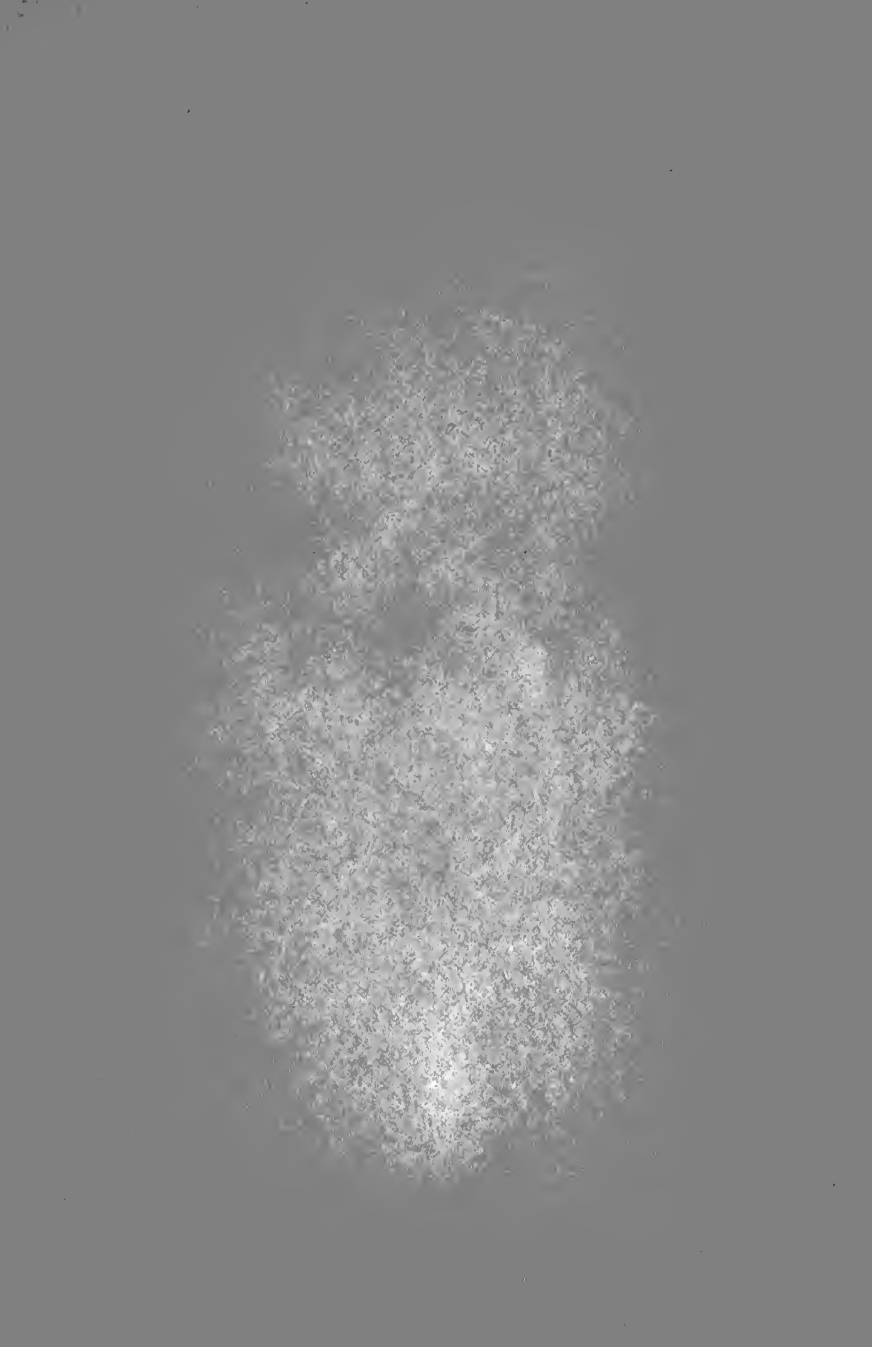
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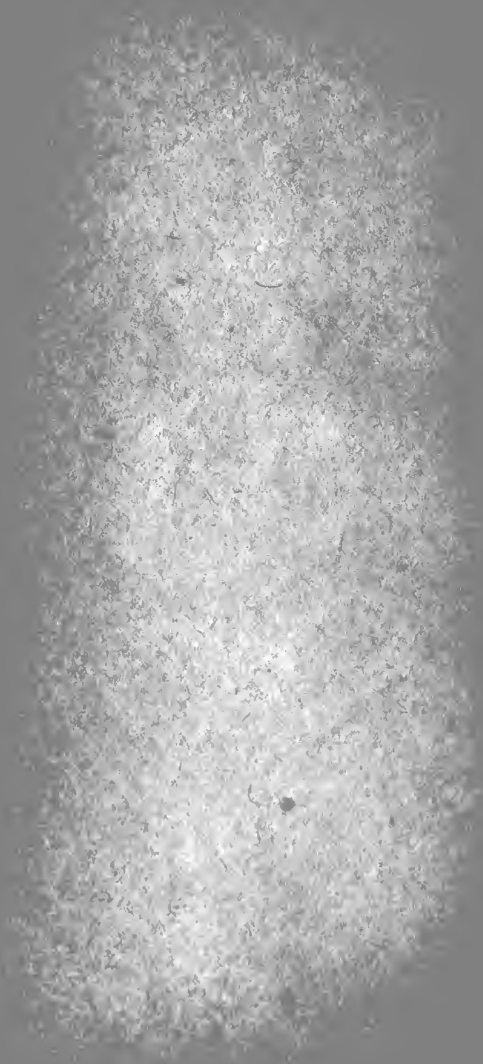
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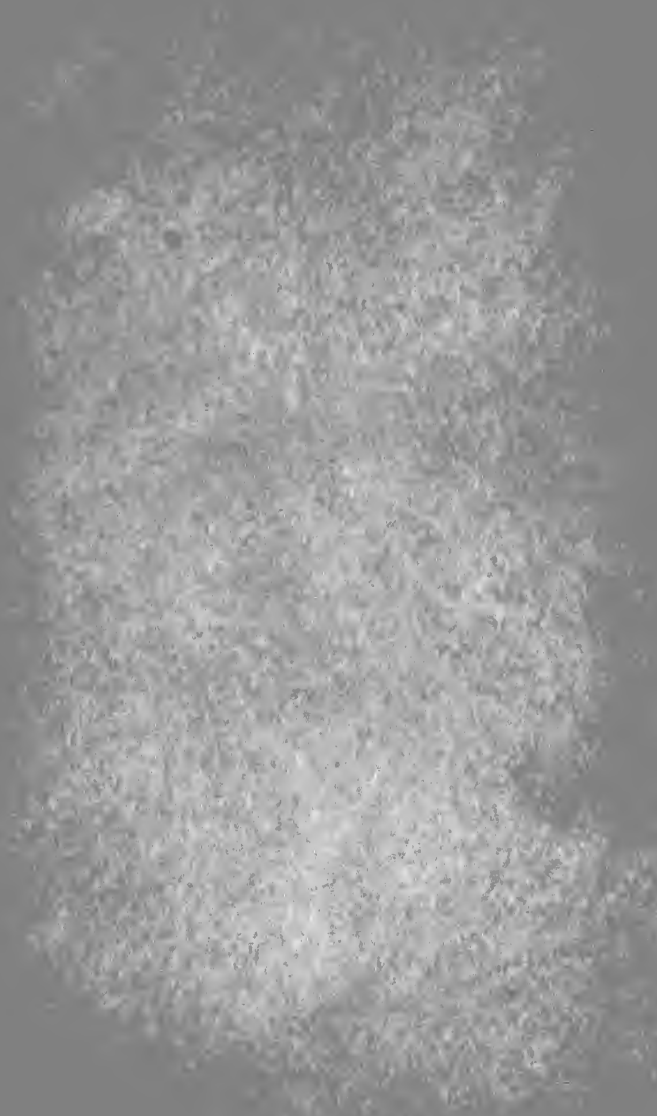
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.













FLORECITA

F L O R E C I T A

BY

BELLA FRENCH SWISHER

"

*" If a star were confined into a tomb
Her captive flames must needs burn there ;
But when the hand that locks her up, gives room,
She'll shine through all the sphere."*

—VAUGHAN.

*" We see but dimly through the mists and vapors ;
Amid these earthly damps,
What seem to us but sad funereal tapers,
May be Heaven's distant lamps."*

—LONGFELLOW.

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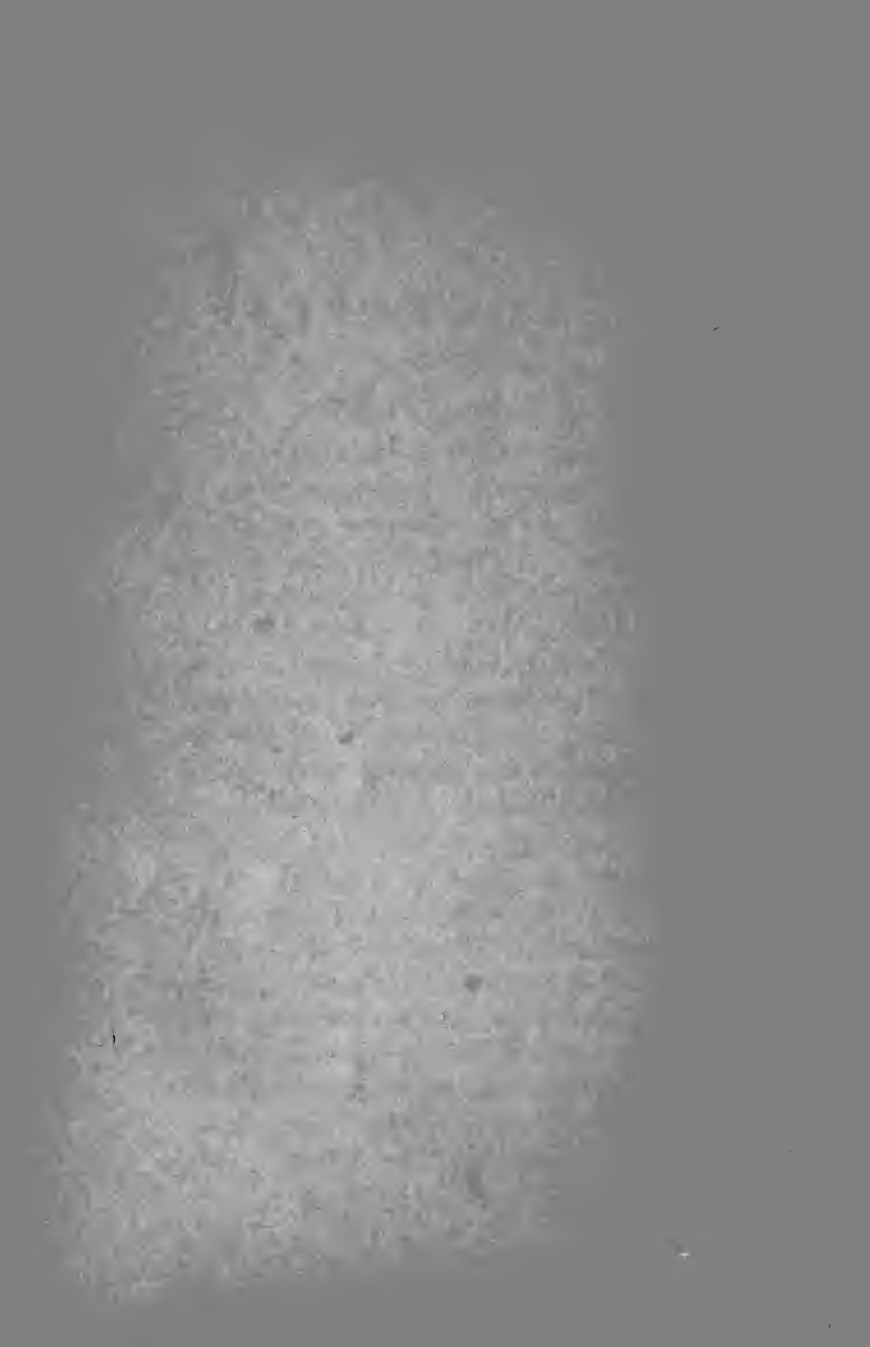


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Copyright, 1889,
BY
BELLA FRENCH SWISHER.

DEDICATION.
TO MY HUSBAND,
COL. JOHN M. SWISHER,
WHOSE INTEREST IN MY DAY-DREAMS
HAS INSPIRED IT,
THIS ONE
IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED.



FLORECITA.

CHAPTER I.

A SEAPORT town, half circled by a bay,
Whose shining waters far beneath it lay,
Reflecting palaces, embowered in bloom,
Which gave no hint of chill December gloom !
And yet it was December ; for the sun
Was in the southern sky, and threw upon
The earth its slanting rays, though high noon-day.

Upon the streets, appeared a motley crowd—
The rich, the poor, the humble and the proud,
With leisure jostle, passed each other by.
For there, beneath an April-tinted sky,
The thought of hurry rarely finds a place.
Fair señorítas, rich in native grace ;
The tawny Mexicans, wrapped up in shawls,
Who lingered at the market-vendor's stalls ;
Tall señors, 'neath the wide *sombrero's* shade ;
The courtly dons ; and, now and then, a maid
Or youth with fairer face and lighter hair,
Whose quicker step and still more sprightly air
Told of another race, where Freedom finds
Her altar-shrines in all her children's minds.

American and Spaniard, Briton, Jew,
A sprinkling of the Dutch and Irish, too,
Were of that town and state, its citizens,
Whose places of abode, ranged up from dens
Of infamy, to mansions, tall and grand,
Commanding wide-spread views of sea and land.

Plantations, rich in cocoa-palm, were seen ;
And, stretching far toward the fields of green—
The winter gardens of the south—were bowers
Of orange trees, sweet with their fruits and
flowers.

“ Bright skies above, a blooming earth below !
O, is there room for aught of care or woe ? ”

Paul Markham asked the question, as along
He walked, one of that motley, moving throng.

Yet he was far away from home and friends.
Where noble Mississippi’s water blends
With the Missouri’s tide, his native hills
Were white with snow, and frozen were the rills,
Which sing to nodding flow’rs in summer time,
Filling the poet-soul with melody and rhyme.

“ A winter in the south ; ”—for it, he yearned ;
And when the leaves were brown, his back he
turned

Upon his boyhood’s home, and thither strayed,
To revel in the sweets of hill and glade,
In that dear land, where winter’s icy breath
To nature brings no gloom or chill of death !

“A blooming earth below! Bright skies
o’erhead;

O, is there room for care and woe?” he said.

But as he spoke, a girl, in Spanish dress,
With large black eyes of melting tenderness,
Soft as a dove’s, yet full of unshed tears—
A very child in form and face and years,
Grace, purity in every move and look—
Her stand upon a corner pavement took,
And there began to sing—sing like a bird,
Though in the song was syllabled no word.

And what a voice! such strength and compass
there!

It rose—it fell—it melted into air!
The merest breeze that scarcely seems to blow
Has not a note more sweetly soft and low.

Paul felt his being thrilled; his soul a lyre
Filled, at her touch, with Heav’nly thought and
fire.

She was a being of angelic birth,
Who brought the “music of the spheres” to earth!

And when he noticed bold, rough men, who
flung

With trashy coins, the ridicule of tongue,
And, laughing, passed her by, he wished that he
A thunder-bolt could for one instant be,
To crush them into utter nothingness,
For offering insult where he fain would bless.

The idle crowd passed on, she stood alone;

And, as the mellow sunlight on her shone,
Paul saw despair was written on her face.

He spoke to her before she left the place
Where she had warbled forth her thrilling song.

“Fair Señorita, I do not belong
To your dear land. But you have touched my
heart,

And I would do a friend’s, or brother’s part.
You seem distressed. If you will tell me why,
I may relieve you. There! Sweet one, do not cry!
(The pent-up tears had now begun to flow
In answer to his tones so kind and low.)

First tell me whence my fairy song-bird came,
And if she bears on earth an earthly name?”

“My name is Florecita,” and her eyes
Were raised to his with questioning surprise.

“That means in your sweet tongue, a floweret,
But I have in my mind one better yet—
One which the angels must have given;
Ave Celeste—Bird of Heaven.”

“O, Señor, mock you not my grief and woe!
My mother, poor and ill, is lying low
With fever. Father died a week ago,
Stabbed in the back—by whom unknown.
And now I fear to walk the streets alone
Because of one—Don Carlos is his name—
Who tries to lead me to a life of shame.

“And yet, my child, you sing upon the street
With voice so musical and heav’nly sweet

That all must pause to listen to the strain ! ”

“ Ah ! Señor, think not that the greed of gain
Hath drawn me forth in misery like mine !

My mother needeth medicine and wine,
And not a *medio* we, with which to buy.

I have to sing or see my mother die
While needing them. My only gift is song.”

“ Poor, loving child ! ’Tis nothing wrong ! ”
Paul Markham quickly said, and to his eyes,
Deep, earnest, tinted like those southern skies,
A sudden moisture came, which dimmed the light
Till Florecita’s face was lost to sight.

A sympathetic, loving heart had Paul,
With all the good which to mankind may fall.
He lived in nature, nature’s worshiper.
Its grandeur ever caused his soul to stir
With noble thoughts that led to noble aims.
Truth, honor, were, with his, companion names.
The world, in which he dwelt, was the ideal.
He had but little knowledge of the real.
And he had reached the age of twenty-eight,
Smiled on by fortune and untried by fate.
His life, so far, untempted by the wrong,
He little thought he could be aught but strong
In love of virtue and of all things right ;
Since sin was an abhorrence in his sight.

“ I’ll go with you and help relieve your care,”
He said ; “ at least some of your burdens share.”

Without a word, she turned and led the way

To where *adobe* huts were old and grey—
A thriftless street, unsought by lounging men,
And e'en by women, quite deserted then.

She paused, at last, before an open door.
The single room, revealed, had neither floor
Nor furniture, except some articles home-made,
And very little clothing was displayed.

She sprang into the hut. Paul heard a cry
And followed her to learn the reason why.

Upon a bed of skins, a pale form lay—
A woman once, but now a lump of clay,
O'er which, poor Florecita bent in grief,
Too deep for sympathy to give relief.

How sweet she was! Her bare arms wildly
flung
Her wealth of flowing, jetty locks among;
Her fingers tightly clasped above her head,
As, to and fro, she rocked beside the bed,
Talking in loving accents to the dead!
Tears fell in show'rs, like crystal drops of rain;
Her finely moulded limbs twitched with their
pain,
Despair in every accent of her moan.

"Gone! Gone, O God! and I am left alone!
No friends, no home, no loving hand to guide.
O, darling mother, take your child!" she cried.

Two dusky women now stepped through the
door,
And from the corpse, the weeping girl they bore,

Outside beneath an oleander's shade,
Among whose wealth of bloom, the sunlight
played.

Paul Markham followed them. His soul was
stirred

As it had never been by mortal word,
Or sigh, or tear, or moan. For her dear sake
He thought, what sacrifice would he not make !

"Sweet Florecita," bending low, he said ;
"Let not your gentle heart be filled with dread.
I'll be to you a friend—a brother, true
And steadfast as, o'erhead, the sky of blue.
Start not ! I mean no wrong. The Father
knows

I would not add one tear-drop to your woes.
Before your purity a stain should wear
By act of mine, my faithless heart I'd tear,
And cast it from me for the dogs to eat !"

The maiden raised her eyes. A smile, quite
sweet,
Played 'round her trembling lips, then from
them fled.

"*Dios Bendecira !*" she simply said.

And then a shadow fell upon the ground,
And forward strode a man, with bow profound.

"Don Carlos !" Florecita quickly gasped,
Her small thin hands in wild entreaty clasped,
As closely to her new-found friend she clung,
Her very breath suspended on her tongue.

"Yes, Carlos Ortiz, sweet pupilo, mine,"
He boldly said, "who worships at your shrine!"

His velvet *toga* wrapping o'er his chest,
He bowed again, his hand upon his breast,
Ignoring Paul, as though he were unseen,
Proud ownership asserted by his mien.

"From what I see," said Paul, "I must infer
Your love and presence are unwelcome, sir.
In yonder cabin, still and cold in death—
In want and woe, surrendering her breath,
While her sweet child was singing on the street,
To gain a coin to buy her food to eat—
This maiden's mother lies. The poor child's soul
Is racked thereat, with grief beyond control.
I pray retire. Her woe should sacred be."

"Si, Señor; but the girl belongs to me,"
The other answered suavely. "It is true
She acts the bashful maid, as females do
When wooed by one of us. But, rest your heart,
The wily señorita plays a part.
I do assure you, what the town well knows—
Mine are her charms, which freely she bestows."

"*El embustéro!*" Florecita cried,
"My very glance to him I have denied.
Before the thing he wishes I would be,
I fain would cast myself in yonder sea,
Food for the hungry fishes, dwelling there,
Or for the birds of prey that skim the air!
O, stranger friend!" and at Paul Markham's feet

She threw herself, protection to entreat ;
“ Pray save me from this cruel, heartless Don,
And I will crawl my hands and knees upon
To serve you—be your ever-willing slave ! ”

A quick and gasping sigh Paul Markham gave,
As bending low above the grief-bowed head,
He whispered, “ You shall be my wife instead.”

A pure, glad light, caught from the sunlit skies,
Leaped for an instant to the maiden’s eyes.

“ *Diós bendecirá,*” she said again,
“ My friend, the noblest and the best of men.”

Paul raised her gently, holding to her hand,
To show his firm intention now to stand
Between her and her persecutor’s wrath.

He then politely said : “ Across her path,
Sir Don, since she has made appeal to me,
’Twill not be well to come. For I shall see
She is protected. Not a creature yet,
Of confidence in me has found regret.”

“ Then you and I will meet some other day ! ”
Spoke up the haughty Don and strode away.

CHAPTER II.

'Twas night. Above the bay, up rose the moon,
Round, gleaming in a sky of liquid blue,
Giving the waves a molten silver hue.
The air was balmy like a northland June.
Sweet with the kisses of the flow'rs, the breeze
Sang a soft lullaby among the trees,
Fanning Paul Markham's brow as out he strolled
For quiet thought. An unfrequented street,
Whose homes were few, dilapidated, old,
He chose, that he might fewer people meet.
Acting, as he had done, from impulse, he
Already felt a great uneasiness.
His lack of wisdom he could plainly see,
Yet scarce knew how he could have offered less.

"What have I done?" he questioned, with a
sigh,

"I am both glad and sad; I know not why.
And if my friends knew all, what would they say?
Pledged to a child, unknown but yesterday,
I find myself; nor wish I to retreat.
With such a voice her nature must be sweet,
And I am filled with holy love of her—
A most devout and humble worshiper.
My fancy paints her high among the stars;
But reason, by a touch, the picture mars,

And as a mere street beggar points her out—
A girl, whose truth and virtue, I might doubt.
What earnest eyes are hers! It can not be
That she is acting, thus deceiving me!
She, with her few short years, must know less sin,
Than my much longer life has entered in.
Why should I judge her? or why hope to hold
A sweet-voiced angel and a harp of gold
To my more worldly breast, who ne'er aspire
To touch, with unsoiled hands, a Heav'nly lyre?
I love her! yes; and that should be enough.
True love should have no doubts, no jealous fears.
I can make smooth a path that has been rough,
Can light the eyes which have been dimmed with
tears,
And give a sweetness to her coming years.
And she can bless me by her loving smile,
And by her songs my lonely hours beguile."

Then on his vision flashed an earnest face,
With orbs in whose blue depths he well could trace
The thoughtful soul clearly reflected there;
A brow, half hid by rings of nut-brown hair,
Yet broad and high—his cousin's cousin, Claire.
No kin of his by blood, and yet in name
They each had recognized a kinship claim.

Sweet Claire Le Clair, a sunny tempered child
Who years ago upon his life had smiled!

A decade since, he roamed her father's land,
The tiny creature clinging to his hand,

Oft startling him with questions, old and wise,
And showing interest in his replies,
Advance beyond her stature and her years ;
Yet April-hearted in her smiles and tears.

A child of seven—ten years lay between
That time and now. So Claire was seventeen.

Why did his roaming thoughts revert to her ?
Why did the moon's bright face become a blur,
As low he said : " Ten years ! She must forget—
At least, will learn my choice with no regret " ?

A stealthy step was heard upon the ground.
An instant later, Paul had turned around.
He saw a quiver of the thick mesquite,
That grew in clusters by the lonely street.
Instinctively he felt a danger nigh,
And, looking forth, intently, could descry
A Mexican's dark visage in the bush.

Well armed, Paul forward strode without a fear
And gave the drooping boughs a sudden push ;
When lo ! he saw a dagger, very near,
Flash like a single star upon the night.

So blue the sky, so perfect was the light
That one could trace the outlines of a leaf.

With quicker movement than his hiding foe,
(His is a quicker race and time was brief),
Paul Markham grabbed the villain, crouching low,
And dragged him to the center of the street,
Thus cutting off all chances for retreat.

The dagger dropped, meanwhile, upon the ground,
But Paul secured it, with a single bound ;
Then broke the blade and threw the bits away,
Returning where the cow'ring rascal lay,
Before the latter found the time to rise.

"Dog of a Mexican!" cried Paul in wrath.
"Who put you as assassin on my path?
Name you your master, or by yonder skies
If this right hand of mine can do its part,
A bullet finds its way straight to your heart!"

"*No intienda!*" gasped the shrinking cur.
Paul gave the Spanish version of the threat.

"It was for Florecita, Señor, her
You took away with you—whom you have yet,
Old Hugo, only poor old Mexican,
Must execute all that his masters plan."

"Your masters, knave? Give me the villain's
name,

Who planned this black atrocity to-night.
Too cowardly for vengeance in the light
Of broad daytime, by stealth he seeks my life!
Sends out a skulking coward with a knife,
To stab me in the back while on my way
All peacefully, I walk! His name I say!"

"O, pity poor old Mexican, I pray!"
The creature cried. "Don Carlos bade me take
Your noble life for Florecita's sake."

"And what is she to him? The truth, you knave,

Or I will make you ready for a grave
Before yon moon has traveled to the west,
One other hand of space. Has he been blest
With that sweet angel's innocence and love?"

"No, Señor. By the holy God above
The child is pure as water at its fountain head,
And on Don Carlos looks with hate and dread."

"And knowing this, you, miscreant, aspire
To help him drag her through pollution's mire!
Should I not crush you, here, beneath my heel
As I would crush a reptile in my path?
Why should I pity for an instant feel
For one who in his breast no pity hath!
Yet, live, base cur! Back to your master lie!
He asks my life; go, take him this reply:
Before to-morrow's sun sinks in the west
Sweet Florecita's drooping head shall rest
Upon my bosom; and this strong right arm
Will, henceforth, shield my darling from all
harm!

Go, now! But if again you cross my way,
No moment longer shall my hand delay
In sending you to Purgatory's shade!"

The wretch good use of the permission made,
And toward the town he ran, at utmost speed,
Not daring to look back, nor giving heed
To aught except the saving of his life,
So wholly worthless and so filled with strife.

CHAPTER III.

NEXT morning, while the slanting rays of light
Lay on the dewy grass, and gemmed the flow'rs,
Poor Florecita, who had passed the hours—
The sad and lonely hours of silent night—
In tearful wakefulness, was led by Paul
Out to the carriage, following the dead
To its long home—a spot that proved to be
Within the hearing of the restless sea,
And where the brightest rays of sun were ever
shed.

Just Paul and Florecita—they were all
Who stood beside her mother's resting-place.

Upon the mourner's cheek, was seen a trace
Of weary sleepless hours, and recent tears.
But now her grief was banished by her fears,
And, pale and trembling, by the grave she stood ;
For she had learned of the atrocious plot
Against Paul's life, to make her own a blot
Upon the fair, pure name of womanhood.

The sods dropped down upon the coffin lid
With hollow sounds ; the senseless clay they hid
Was lonely Florecita's last of kin.

But she was young. Her world was yet to win,
And love was wooing her to peace and rest.

A bitter sob told how she felt her loss,

As, on the grave, she placed a flower-cross—
A fitting emblem for a mother's breast.

And then the two, who met but yesterday,
But now affianced, slowly moved away,
Returning, in the sunlight, by the shore,
Whose yellow sands were washed by restless
waves,

That sang a requiem beside the graves,
Which all the blooming hill-side dotted o'er—
A sad refrain of "Never—never more!"

* * * * *

Paul knowing not what danger might betide
The lonely child, resolved to claim his bride
Without delay, and she was not averse.
The kind old priest demurred, but Markham's
purse

Removed the one objection—unlike creeds.
The blessing of her church was thus secured,
But Paul was firmly told that he must needs
Take up with her the cross which she endured.

They knelt together, those two strangers, there,
Beneath the benediction and the prayer,
After the marriage service had been read,
A hand in blessing placed upon each head,
As in low tones the priest pronounced them wed!
When, lo! a form appeared within the door;
And, up the narrow aisle, fast walked the Don,
His velvet *toga*, and his saber on;
And black the frown his ugly visage wore.

“This lawless marriage, I forbid!” he said;
“For me, alone, can Florecita wed!
We were espoused beside her father’s bed,
When he lay dying. Except the service read,
We two are man and wife. I claim my own,”
And proud defiance echoed in his tone.

“*El Pécardo!*” flashed forth Paul Markham’s
bride,
And, springing from her knees, she boldly cried:
“My poor stabbed father breathed no single
word

That by a mortal ear, Sir Don, was heard;
But in a long and senseless stupor lay,
As well the father knows—thus passed away.
And though unpunished was the deed of shame,
I think the foul assassin I can name
In you, Sir Don, who sent a coward slave
To stab a man because he pity gave
To me, a starving girl, bereaved, distressed!
Ay, start! ’Tis well. The villain has confessed,
To clear himself by implicating you,
So you will learn, perchance, what law can do.”

“Nay, Florecita,” it was Paul who spoke,
And his firm voice resounding echoes woke
In that dim, silent church, whose ghostly light,
And chill, and gloom might be of kin to night.
“Mine is the task to shield the wife I chose,
From calumny and her revengeful foes.
The Don must realize it is too late,

To wreak the vengeance urged by hate,
Since I can send him to a dungeon-cell,
With half the story that I have to tell."

"My children, leave the Don with me," the
priest

In interruption said. "Go to your feast
And on your wedding tour, without a fear.
My son," this to the Don, "pray linger here,
For I would wish to speak to you alone."

"Come, then, my love," said Paul, in gentle
tone.

"The father has dismissed us—we obey."
And gallantly the bridegroom led the way
Adown the chapel's aisle, into the street,
Now noisy with the tread of many feet.

Theirs was a strange, strange marriage ; not
without

A share of love. Of his, Paul had no doubt.
But Florecita was a child. Her soul,
Pure, unimpassioned, had not felt the wave
Of woman's all-absorbing love. The whole
Of her child-love was in her mother's grave.
Her waking dreams were not those of the heart ;
For in her hopes, ambition played a part,
And told her she had talent to be great—
That great she would be, unless crushed by fate.

The two were so unlike ! He, fair and tall,
And she, a lovely child, dark-eyed and small,
Robed in a Spanish dress of simple style ;

Her finely molded arms and shoulders bare;
And unconfined her black, luxuriant hair;
He in his business suit of grey, meanwhile
Seemed to have brought with him his native air.

The curious oft eyed them, as along
They went, among the motley moving throng;
And Paul, who was a very little vain,
Saw, with a throb of wounded pride and pain,
The nationality of each was plain;
And he resolved that ere they journeyed thence
The world should cease to mark the difference.
Another style of dress, he had no doubt,
A change, quite radical, could bring about.
Her accent, too, he hoped to mend, in time,
And make her like the women of his clime.

Ah, me! I doubt if from the Heavenly sphere,
Some sweet-faced, white-robed angel wandered
here,
That any one would take her to his breast
And think that some remod'ling were not best.

CHAPTER IV.

To think, with Paul, was quickly to decide,
And to decide was but to act with haste ;
And he, at once, selected for his bride,
Some garments better suited to his taste.

He marked how eagerly the robes were grasped,
What pleasure shone upon her childlike face,
And, oh ! how joyfully her fingers clasped,
To show the rings which there had found a place !

Thought Paul : “ My angel is a woman, sure,
With all a woman’s vanity in dress,
Yet how angelic is her loveliness !
Her form, so graceful ; and her face so pure !
And what a voice ! One has to hear her sing
But to imagine she will soon take wing
And join, in Heav’nly realms, the angel choir !
The world, to which I take her, must admire
Her pure, exquisite notes—her beauty, too ;—
Perhaps, will rob my flower of its dew ;
And soil the garments that her spirit wears ;
Entrap her with deceit and gilded snares !
Yet she, who shrank from sin in lowly life,
Will surely not be weak, an honored wife,
Hemmed in by love, with comforts at command,
And joys awaiting her on every hand.

“ But I recall my mother’s words. ’ Ofttimes

I've heard her say, when speaking of the crimes
And jealousies of those in life's high walk—
So sweet a subject for the gossips' talk !

“ ‘ To lowly lives, but few temptations come ;
For poverty and labor hedge the soul
From subtle passions, which will visit some
On life's broad highway, where without control
Those passions roam at pleasure, seeking prey
Among the purest souls that pass that way.
Then vanity, a whirlpool, may draw in
Some fain to flee the yawning gulf of sin.’ ”

“ The angel of the old *adobe* cot
May not survive her fortune's better lot.”

Then Paul began to blame himself. Thought
he :

“ My fears are but the pangs of jealousy.
I want her for myself, my own, my bride ;
To live for naught in all the world beside !
O, I would seek for her, Earth's fairest bowers,
And I would crown her queen of all the flowers,
Would gather up the sweetest notes of birds
And to the melody set loving words,
For her to sing ! Would call the angels down
To give my bird in Heav'nly spheres, renown !
But man, the vandal, for her own dear sake,
A glance into our Eden should not take !

“ Now is this love or jealousy, or both ?
Or is it to protect her, I am loth
That others should admire, as I have done

And do ? Base selfishness, since like the sun
True genius shed its warming rays for all,
However rich or poor, or great or small.
Desires like mine are worthy of a cur !
The world, outside, should know and worship
her !

And education polish up the gem,
That is to sparkle in my diadem !”

Meanwhile, Paul Markham watched the girl’s
delight,

And his own eyes, in consequence, grew bright.

“If things like these would win her love,”
thought he,

“Thus I would spend my fortune willingly.”

But Florecita, looking in his face,
With intuition read the silent thought.

“*Amigo*, mine,” she said, “the love men place
A value on, is neither sold nor bought,
But like the rain and sunlight comes unsought,
To bless, or curse, according to our needs
(One’s blessing often proves another’s woe),
And he who woman’s truer nature reads,
These plainly written facts must surely know.

“My swelling heart is filled with gratitude,
Such as I feel for Him who dwells above !
You are my spirit’s sunlight, rain and food—
Amigo, mine, say, is this feeling love ?
Has it intensity and fire
To satisfy your soul’s desire ?

“It may be love,” she went on, “yet it seems
That music is the lover of my dreams—
Or rather that I should belong
To one who loves and lives in song.
O, I have wandered forth in leisure hours,
To hold a sweet communion with the flow’rs
And listen to the language of the birds,
Which I can well translate to human words.
And often, in a melancholy mood,
An unknown lover I have wooed,
In bird-notes, asking why he tarried long.
And lo ! he answered back to me in song.
His tones, which seemed to come from some far
hill,
Made every nerve within my being thrill !
Up sprang my soul, with vain desire to break
Its earthly bonds for that dear lover’s sake !
Perhaps in other climes he had his birth,
And waits for me above this planet, Earth,
Till death shall come and set my spirit free,
Perhaps he now is here and you are he !
If not, *Díos* forgive and pity me !”

Tears filled her eyes. Her tone was sweet
And low, for Paul and she were in the street,
Where idle crowds were moving to and fro.

Paul Markham’s head dropped down upon his
breast,
Her earnest words had fallen like a blow,
Half crushing out his hopes of happiness.

“Poor child,” he said, “perhaps where I
would bless

By giving you sweet comfort, love, and rest,
I yet shall prove a curse to clog your way.
Perhaps that it is even as you say,
And I am he for whom you waited long.
You called to me—I answered to your song.
My soul went forth to meet you ere a note
Had time to issue from your bird-like throat.
O, Florecita, darling, sweetheart, wife!
You hold my fortune, honor, life!
Accept me as the dreamland love you wooed,
And not because of simple gratitude!”

Then Florecita saw his soul arise
And shine forth from the depths of his blue eyes.

“What God has willed,” she said, “must
surely be,
But, oh! I wish to think that you are he!”

CHAPTER V.

AGAIN up rose the moon, and climbing high
With wondrous light lit earth, and sea, and sky,
The objects in the landscape showing plain,
That lay beyond the swiftly moving train.

Paul Markham and his bride were found
thereon.

Her fears, her poverty, the angry Don
Were left behind ; yet Florecita wept,
And, with her sobs, time to the rumbling kept.

How bright the programme, which before
them lay !

A winter's travel in the summer land
Until the balmy breath of sunlit May
Should northward come to melt the icy band
Which locked the rippling streams and chilled
the flow'rs

That are so beautiful in summer hours.
To linger by the sea, till spring was nigh,
And deeply, darkly blue the Texas sky—
Then while the April roses scent the air
Go for a visit to his Aunt Le Clair,
And stop a month, perhaps, or longer there
Before he sought his own, sweet native glade—
Such was the plan of travel Markham made.

Still Florecita wept when came the change,

The world to which she went was new and strange.

Her child associations thus were left ;
And lowly though they were, she felt bereft.

But as new scenes were to her vision borne,
And days and weeks went by, she ceased to
mourn—

At least, with outward grief. Her eyes grew
bright,

And pleasures brought to her a child's delight.
Once more, she sang ! and when upon the air,
Her notes were borne from chamber, parlor, hall,
The highest and the lowest dweller there
Paused breathlessly to catch them each and all.

Upon the very winds her fame went out,
And admiration followed her about—
A pleasant wooer—wheresoe'er she turned,
Increasing hourly, yet for more she yearned.

At first she sang for Paul. Then for the
crowd

Of eager listeners who gathered nigh,
Her bird-like notes rang clear and loud
Till admiration shone in her life's sky,
As up above the earth, the beaming sun ;
Filling her soul with warmth when it was bright,
And wooing spirit blossoms by its light ;
But leaving darkness when its day was done.

Paul gloried in her triumphs ; yet was sad
To find that they for her more pleasure had

Than all his love could give. She seemed to
grow

Above, beyond him ; even as a vine,
Clinging to some tall bush, may leave below
A modest violet ;—high o'er it throw
Its gayer blossoms in the balmy air,
By their bright color and their rare design
Attracting many warm admirers there,
Who would not feel a shadow of regret
In crushing 'neath their feet the violet.

Paul took her to the opera one night.
The play was that of Faust and Marguerite ;
And ne'er before had Florecita heard
From human lips aught so divinely sweet.
She drank in every note and word,
Her eager face expressing wild delight.

“Ah ! I was born to sing like that !” she said.

“Nay, Florecita,” and Paul shook his head.
“I love your triumphs while in private life ;
But from a public stage must keep my wife !
Temptations, dear, are often met with there,
Which, sometimes, purest, truest souls ensnare.
Then jealousy, and bickering, and hate,
And calumny and often insult, too,
Come to each prima donna, soon or late ;
And strong, indeed, are they who pass such
through,
And take upon their robes no stain of sin !
O, darling, I entreat that you will win

Your Heav'nly diadem by angel deeds !
The fame, such as a noble spirit needs,
Can come from other sources than the crowd,
Whose adulations, be they e'er so loud,
Are ever-changing as the winds that blow !
God sent you here to sing ; but sing for good !
Send forth your notes to Him in gratitude !
Sing for the sick and weary—it will rest !
And sing for him, my sweet, who loves you best ! ”

But Florecita's head dropped on her breast
And to her heart a pale, cold hand, she pressed.

“ Out in the world you bring me,” thus she
spoke ;

“ And show me blooming heights, yet bind my
wings !

But I a captive bird, my bonds once broke,
Will soar through sunlight up to higher things.
A voice has called me, but you are not he.
My spirit-love would soar and sing with me.
Hast never seen a bird, while singing, rise ?
And, lo ! its mate with song behind it flies
Till side by side they skim the sunlit air !
Thus with a truly mated human pair ! ”

“ I love you,” answered Paul ; “ and I would
bless——”

“ Yes ; but your love is mixed with selfishness.
When admiration makes my spirit glad,
I look at you, and lo ! I find you sad !
And then, when sadness hovers 'round my head,

Your soul is filled with gloomy doubts, and dread
That I, in some weak hour will prove untrue
To my own womanhood, as well as you.

“If in some desert you and I should dwell,
Where not a breath of mine could touch a cheek
Except your own, nor I to others speak,
You yet your jealous fears and doubts would
tell.”

“But it is love—true love, my child,” said Paul,
“A man wants some return who gives his all.”

“As when they purchase goods—a fair exchange,”

Laughed Florecita. “All for all. It is not strange
In bargain contracts; but in love, absurd!
And ‘love,’ thus used, is not the fitting word.
It is a semblance simply bought and sold
For some consideration, if not gold.

“A love far different is in my dreams!
So high above such jealousy, it seems,
That I compare it only to the sun,
Except its warmest rays are but for one,
From whom it asks for no return save this:—

“To see that one grow happy by its kiss,
Expanding, in its light, to leaf and bloom,
And giving to the breeze its sweet perfume!

“Your love would put a case about
The plant with but one place for looking out;
That straight at you; the space so cramped and
small,

The flow'r would surely never bloom at all."

Paul marked the wisdom which her words conveyed,

And to his soul the secret promise made—

To leave his sweet, young song-bird ever free

To use her wings, and her true mate to be.

Alas! we write our good resolves in sand;

Our bad ones trace on rock with firm right hand!

He weary grew when she was happiest;

Thought longingly of home and quiet rest,

And hailed the day which northward turned his face,

Almost regretting that his Aunt Le Clair

Expected him and Florecita at her place;

And that he had a month to visit there

Before his weary travels would be done.

The invitation was a pressing one:—

"Dear Paul:

"Bring your bride, whom I know you adore

(I am dying to meet her, and so is Lenore),

And make us a visit. Now do not delay,

We want you both here on the first day of May.

"The girls have been planning—Lenore and sweet Claire—

(You remember her, don't you? though when you were there

She was scarcely as high as the back of a chair.

She remembers you well. And her hero you were,

She laughingly told me, for many a year).

“ Well, the girls have been planning, as I have just said,

Quite a pleasant surprise for the one you have wed ;

Though just what it's to be, I am bid not to say—

But be sure to be here on the first day of May.

“ I will close, but my love this short letter shall bear

To you and your bride, from your aunt,

“ Ruth LeClair.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE time was April ; Texas was the land ;
The place, a blooming bow'r ; within, a band
Of merry-hearted maidens, in their teens ;
And one of nature's most magnificent of scenes,
The background. For a mountain tow'ring high,
Like pictured Faith, was pointing to the sky—
That beauty of the south, deep, dark in hue.
Below, the river seemed a moving sky of blue,
The scene reflecting there—the mountain's crest,
Trees, flowers, bushes, and the glowing west.
The very cloudlets, lightly floating o'er
The sky, the stream's clear surface bore.

The arch was hung with many a blooming vine.
The regal rose and modest, sweet woodbine
Together mingled, giving both a charm
Possessed alone by neither ; as man's arm
Around fair woman, she upon his breast,
Show womanhood and manhood at its best ;
Her faith and beauty, his great strength and
mind,
Each glorify the other, thus entwined.

Beneath the shade, the maidens, half a score,
Talked of a May-day *fête* the eve before.
The leader of the band was fair Lenore,
Le Clair's proud child, whose features wore

A look as if she owned the others there,
And 'twas her right, a diadem to wear.

Her father's land stretched to the mountain's
base.

A lordly mansion was his dwelling place,
His children reared in luxury and ease,
Were haughty, tyrannizing, hard to please.
Smiles, favors, luxuries, they bought ;
And longed to purchase education, thought,
And well developed minds.

Lenore was tall.

Her hands were white, symmetrical and small,
Her features smooth, and regular, and fair,
And like the midnight were her eyes and hair.
Beside her stood her guest—her cousin, Claire,
Brown-haired, but rather plain in face,
Claire lacked in beauty—almost lacked in grace;
And yet a magnetism in her eyes
Gave the beholder oft a glad surprise.
When in their depths her soul was seen to shine,
Her features, in expression, seemed divine.

Eastward, perhaps a hundred miles or so,
Claire's father dwelt, but in another State.
A pleasant home was his with less of show
Than at Le Clair, and less of pride and hate.
For none love arrogance ; and to the poor
It brings a smart, they like not to endure.
Claire's people loved her ; and she was the means
Of joy to them. Each was her worshiper.

But to Lenore, the servants were machines
That made her comforts; yet they hated her.

Their fathers were own brothers. But to Paul
As said before, Claire was no kin at all.
His father's sister, mother of Lenore,
Was a Le Clair but in the name she bore.

The property of Lloyd and John Le Clair
Was undivided; and the latter's share
Was in Lloyd's business. Fortune might swamp
all

Of land and money, which both brothers owned;
Might even bring a heavy loss to Paul
And others, who the firm had money loaned.

So much by way of explanation.

Eight

Young girls, beside the cousins, were in wait
To pay respects to Paul's sweet bride. For they
Had just arrived, to spend the first of May.

“Our cousin's wife takes long, it seems, to
rest,”

Spoke up Lenore, her glances turning west,
Where hung the sun, above his couch of red,
And sent his level rays to gild her head.

“I wished so much you, girls, and she might
meet,

For she is beautiful and just too sweet—
So well refined, one cannot fail to know
She sprang from nothing that is poor and low,
But came of noble blood—the very best.”

A sweet and rippling laugh rang on the air.
"Your intuitions are all wrong," said Claire,
"In early morn, we, in the garden, walked,
While you yet slumbered. Of her past we talked.
She told me of her home, her parents—all;
And how she met and fell in love with Paul.
Her father molded images in wax,
And often would his daughter's patience tax
By giving her some of his work to do."

"What!" cried Lenore. "Can such a thing
be true?"

Paul Markham with a working-woman mate,
And bring his plebeian wife for us to *fête*!
The thought makes all my being burn with hate."

"Lenore," said Claire, and earnest was her face,
"I know full well that it is not my place
To champion your guests. But as of shame
You speak of work. You seem to think the name
Breathes forth disgrace, dishonor. Oft, Lenore,
While yet a child, I deeply would deplore,
The fate which gave me irksome tasks to do.
And in my heart, I blamed my mother, too,
Because she made them. Often tried to shirk
My duties. Once I told her that I hated work.
Yes, told her hotly—I, her wayward child.
She tried to soothe my passion, burning wild,
By loving words, 'My darling Claire,' she said,
'Work leads mankind to joy's great fountain-
head."

Though idle pleasures sometimes briefly bless,
Work is the road to lasting happiness—
The only road—the Maker willed it so.’
(Tears filled Claire’s eyes. Her tones were sweet
and low

And had a world of pathos in them.) ‘God
Sent Adam out to turn the virgin sod
Because of laws transgressed. He chose to eat
•Fruit from the tree of life, and deemed it sweet,
Since it would give him knowledge. To redeem
Himself God bade him labor. This would seem
At first a curse—man from his Eden hurled !
Not so. For work alone redeems the world
From sin and selfishness. Mankind may hope,
Through labor’s blessed aid, almost to cope
With angels in their knowledge and their power.
Work then to man is the Almighty’s dower.
All idleness is ignorance and sin.
All idle souls, the tempter enters in,
A welcome guest ! And idle moments—all
Are unlocked gateways in the soul’s strong wall !
All work is honor ! “Go and till the soil,”
God said, which is the humblest of all toil,
And yet most noble. O, my darling child,
Make *work* your watch-word in the wild
Race of this life ; and humble though it be
Work cheerfully and nobly. You will see
Sweet fruits grow up beneath your gentle touch ;
For God’s best gifts are showered down on such.’

“She then a pretty little fable told—
One she had heard when she was not as old
As I. A vine grew 'neath an apple tree
Longing among the blooming boughs to be,
And greet the sunbeams at the very top.
But it was weak, and even had to drop
Back to the ground. One day an angel came
And softly called the lowly plant by name.
'Don't try too much. Cling here, my friend,'
she said.
'What! to a stink-weed. I'd as soon be dead!'
Replied the vine.

“The angel said: ‘But see,
From here you reach a bush and then the tree.
This humble weed will surely lead you there,
Where you may blossom in the sun and air.’

“Wise vine! It took the angel's counsel
threw
Its tendrils 'round the weed, and later grew
Its blossoms high among the apple boughs.

“Thus with mankind. The wise man ne'er
allows
Himself to spurn the humblest chance that leads
To something higher. So it fills his needs
At present is enough.

“Lenore! Lenore!”
(Her sweet face now almost a glory wore),
“One year ago my mother went above,
Leaving behind the daughter of her love.

But sacred are her teachings yet to me.
She taught that neither high nor low degree
Can make or mar a soul. As coarsest earth
May jewels hide, so lowly lot and birth
May cover up a soul of greatest worth.

“I told of Florecita’s parentage,
Knowing full well that she would tell you all,
And wishing that she should not ’neath you rage,
In its first, blindest, hottest fury, fall.
She comes, an honored and invited guest;
You were unworthy of the name Le Clair,
And that of lady, not to do your best
To make your acts and words a welcome wear.

“A sweet, frank child, she is. God grant the day
May never come, that takes her truth away!
A genius, too. She yet will win renown,
Nor toil, nor poverty can bind her down.
To hear her sing out in the dewy morn
Is to forget that she is lowly born.
The Saviour in a manger lay; and she,
Without disgrace, the lovely child may be
Of one who reared her by his daily toil,
Nor feared that work his honest hands would
soil.”

Claire’s eloquence was powerful. The test
Was in the all-absorbing interest,
With which her words were heard by every guest.

Half-shamed, Lenore, in silence, turned away,
To leave her vengeance for another day.

CHAPTER VII.

MAYDAY. A Maypole wreathed in bloom.

Around

The pole upon the flower-sprinkled ground,
Danced youths and maidens. As we might expect,

Quite small the party was and quite select.

The town itself was small, the people poor,

And mostly of a grade beneath Lenore,

According to her estimate of them.

'Twas thus she had been taught, do not condemn

The girl. If in her haughty, foolish heart

There was no love excepting for that part

Of God's fair children who could boast of power

To live in idleness, such was the dower

Bequeathed her by her parents. Should we think

Her lips would from a purer fountain drink

Than that they offered her? From babyhood

They taught her that the rich alone are good,

And that a soul weighs just the same

As its possessions weigh. Not hers the blame

That on that day when all was joy within,

A crowd of people, such as could not win

An entrance there, peeped through the garden
fence

With eager gaze, nor would be driven thence.

Soon Claire and Florecita from the rest
Had wandered, seeking arbors more remote,
And of a moment's quietude in quest.

They paused at length. A mocking-bird's clear
note

Attracted Claire.

"I love those birds so much!"

She said. "Somehow their music seems to touch
A chord that thrills and vibrates in my soul!
My mother dearly loved them, and the whole
Of her sweet life was love—yes, love the best,
And labor for the loved. Was I not blest
In such a mother? And she raised a bird—
A mocking-bird. Each melody he heard,
He imitated. In my mother's room,
Which was almost a bow'r of leaf and bloom,
He flew about at will. He knew her step,
When to the door she came, and ever kept
A watch for her. He flew to meet her then,
And gently pecked her hands, or face, or hair,
And trilled his love song. When my mother
died

He missed her, drooped his wings and cried—
Refusing food. I took him where she lay,
Cold, silent, pulseless as the very clay
That soon became her last and only bed.
Quite joyously he perched upon her head,
Looked at her closely, fluttered, fell back—dead."

"I know," continued Claire, "most people say

That with such lives, their beings pass away ;
Yet, I believe the heart that broke that day,
But freed a song-bird that will sing for aye,
To swell the chorus of the angel band
And bless my mother in the spirit-land !”

“ We seem as sisters,” Florecita said,
“ For my dear mother, like your own, is dead.
She loved the bird-songs, too. It was through
her

That I became a music-worshiper.
She taught me, when a child, to imitate
Their notes. (She was a genius, crushed by fate,
And all her hopes were centered within me.)
She bade me to aim high—strive to be great
And famous, as she once had hoped to be.
I promised that I would, but now I weep
Because I see no chance the vow to keep.
My lark-song is her teaching. It alone
She told, might gain me access to a throne.”

“ You could,” said Claire, “ quite easily engage
To sing, and make your fortune on the stage.”

“ But Paul objects, and, him so much I owe
Of gratitude, that I am filled with woe,
Between the two conflicting aims in life—
To use my talent should be one, I know ;
And then there is my duty as a wife !”

“ Alas !” said Claire, “ I find it difficult
To give advice, not knowing what result
Might follow either course that you might take.

But I would study for my talent's sake.
Since Paul is wealthy you have every chance
In music and in learning to advance.
Do not despair ! Keep bright your altar-fire !
And answered yet may be your heart's desire."

Lenore now joined them, but sought not to
hide

Her feelings of contempt for Paul's sweet bride.
She led the conversation to the theme
Of difference of high and low degree.

Her cousin's wife, unconscious of the scheme,
Answered her questions quite unwittingly.

"Your hands are soft, my Florecita, dear,"
(Lenore had clasped the member in her own),
"A child of luxury and ease you were !"
And inquiry was in the careless tone.

"O, no. We were quite poor. Each morn,
I early rose that I might grind the corn,
To make *tortillas* for the morning meal ;
And father—I have often helped a deal
In molding waxen images ; although
I had no talent for the work, I know."

"And yet you helped him !" interrupted
Claire,

Who saw Lenore's design. "Quite right in you.
Though rich or poor, 'tis ever sweet to do
That which will give our loved ones help or rest.
My dear, to souls all filled with love, the best,
There is a joy in toiling for the loved."

Lenore, in her design, was still unmoved.

“All bosh!” she rudely snapped. “Now I would see

My parents starve, starvation come to me,
Ere I would cook a meal or make a fire;
Nor would they such a thing of me desire.
There are poor people, lowly born and bred,
Who are to ignorance and toiling wed—
Just human cattle (I’d have made them dumb),
Who do such labor for a trivial sum.
My mamma says, who is a lady, true,
That menial work, a lady will not do.
Indeed, no lady works at all. The line
Is plainly drawn, and by the Hand divine,
Between those human cattle born for toil,
And they unfitted for this life’s turmoil
And menial labor; and my proud race
May die of poverty, but not disgrace!”

“Lenore,” said Claire, “yours is a sad mistake.
The great Creator never thought to make
A single pair of hands for idleness,
And then another, coarser pair to bless
By toil the idle ones. Work had its birth
With Him who made and peopled earth.
To show us what our destiny should be,
He gave us nothing made except what we
Could never make ourselves. Ready for toil,
Yet all uncultivated, was the soil!
Down in the earth, our fuel, hidden low,

But not a guide allowed to show us so !
No stately mansions reared for that proud race
Of idle ones who find in work, disgrace !
No costly robes, wove with a master's care
And ready-made for idle dames to wear !
For homes—He gave us forests, rocks and clay !
Deep in the earth, our gold and jewels lay !
Our dainty robes adorned the backs of sheep,
Or else we found them in the silk-worm's keep.
Our linen is a plant which we must spin
And weave. And these were arts we had to win
By toil and reason. 'Twas by conquest, men
Achieved their power, and the vanquished then
Became the slaves. Thus idleness began.

“How much above his Maker, God, is man,
That God-created toil he calls ‘disgrace’ ?
The works of His almighty hands, we trace
In every cave of earth and sylvan bower,
Each fruitful vine and tree, and lowly flower !
The noblest creature, lowest insect, too,
Alike were His great workmanship, and grew
Beneath His loving touch. No one so small
And low, it may not Him its maker call.
Then why should we, poor mortals, in our turn
The least of honest, needed labor spurn ?

“All are not called upon to toil the same,
For many kinds of toil bear labor's name ;
And though 'tis criminal our time to waste,
The rich have power to gratify their taste

In choice of work. The poor must choose
As chance directs, nor can afford to lose
An opportunity, though each desire
May look to something that they deem is high'r.
The hand of duty points the way to go,
And labor ours ; and be it high or low,
We should not falter. Duty guides the best
Our fragile barks to havens of sweet rest,
E'en though across the ever troubled sea,
Misfortune, and the bark be Poverty."

Claire spoke with youthful fervor. To her life
Had come as yet but little care or strife.
She had not felt ingratitude ; nor seen
(For she was very young, scarce seventeen),
The sacrifice of lives and human hearts,
All unappreciated ; felt no smarts
Of being never, never understood,
Although each thought was for some other's
good ;
Nor been misjudged in greatest sacrifices made ;
And when each act had been, by kindness,
weighed,
Intended the recipient to bless,
And yet denounced by him as selfishness.
Such lessons, oft repeated, make us cold,
Unsympathizing, prematurely old.
But Claire had known them not, and warm and
true,
Was every impulse that her bosom knew.

Lenore essayed to speak. But ere a word
She said, the vines, which made the arbor, stirred,
And Paul looked on the trio, seated there.

“Thanks! Thanks! he cried, “my noble
cousin Claire!

“Unwittingly, I own, I overheard
Your grand defense of labor, truth and right!
My wife and I will leave for home, to-night;
But on our journey thither, we shall bear
In memory, an eager, sainted face,
Which ever in our hearts must hold a place,
Close treasured near a name most sacred—
Claire!”

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE years went by with little change to
Paul

Or Florecita ; for except one fall
Which took them on a journey south, the time
Was spent by them in Paul's own native clime.

She had improved by study and deep thought,
Each moment that her leisure to her brought ;
And sacred in her heart she held the aim
Of winning for herself undying fame.

As Paul lacked sympathy in this, she drew
Herself from him and gradually grew
Quiet and sad. Ah ! she were comfortless
Had Claire's dear letters never come to bless
And cheer her. For her soul went out to Claire
In confidence that Paul could never share,
Since he no aspiration, with her, shared,
Nor for her longings or her triumphs cared.
In fact, he blamed her for her discontent—
Either accused her of ingratitude,
Or he was cold, by way of punishment,
As, at the time, was suited to his mood.

They daily grew apart. Her songs were sung
Beside the limped streams that flowed among
The quiet hills, away from haunts of men,
With but the birds as listeners ; for then

She felt herself a child, and free again.

So contradictory is human life,
That Paul had found distasteful in his wife
The very traits that bound his soul to her
And bowed him as her humble worshiper.

And she—poor child! Ah! it was sad indeed!

Of sympathizing love was soon in need.

Paul felt aggrieved. He could not understand,
Since she had every comfort at command,
And his unselfish love—he thought it so—
Why she should ever droop her head in woe.

How much is prized the fuchsia's drooping
flow'rs

In northern climes! I once in one took pride
And brought it to my sunny, southern home
When, in the north land, I had ceased to roam.
I watched and tended it through anxious hours,
But saw it droop and sicken till it died.

“What ailed the plant?” I asked of one who
knew.

He said in answer: “Fuchsias must have dew
And we have little, in this southern land.”

Ah! it were well could mankind understand
That there are many human fuchsias, too,
That cannot live and flourish without dew—
The dew of sympathy and tenderness,
Without whose touch, the soul is comfortless.

Three years had passed away, as said before,

And winter reigned within the land once more.
On Alton's noble hills, the snow was white,
And ghastly gleamed beneath the moon's pale
light.

But in the city, where the lamps were bright,
Were seen few signs of recent storm;
Because the busy moving to and fro
Of eager feet had trampled down the snow
And melted it, till now the walks were bare,
Excepting that a scale of ice was there.

The theatre was filled by the élite
With smiling faces gathered there to greet
The Señor Schira's troupe.

During the day,
Our Florecita, all unknown to Paul,
Had made the music-manager a call,
And, trembling, asked the privilege to sing
To him alone; choosing a simple thing,
That took him back to his dead mother's knee,
And, in the sad, exquisite melody,
He dreamed he was a child, the singer, she.

As her last notes went sighing through the air,
He raised his eyes—a tear was trembling there,
And when he spoke, quite husky was his voice.

“My child, your singing makes my heart
rejoice!

Who are you? and whence came you? Did
your throat

From southern song-birds learn each rippling
note ?

Or are you native here ? Why are your name,
Genius and beauty yet unknown to fame ?
Out in the world what laurels you might win.
The hiding of such talent is a sin."

" Ah ! Señor, I have pined for such a life,"
Was her reply, " till I am wild with pain !
But I have been three years an honored wife,
And all my eager pleadings have been vain.
My husband's is a proud and haughty race,
And such a step, he thinks, would bring disgrace,
But he is now in Texas—at Le Clair.
Some very urgent business took him there ;
And I refused to bear him company
Because his cousin has ill-treated me.
But the dear South is my own native land,
My home—where ocean billows wash the
strand,

And oleanders bloom and orange trees
Give out their fragrance to the balmy breeze,

" A favor I would ask: Disguise me quite,
And let me sing a single song to-night,
Between the acts, for which I ask no pay ;—
'Twill not prolong or interrupt the play.

" To fill my place for once, though all un-
known,
And be accepted as a queen of song,
Applauded by a most admiring throng,

I would relinquish every joy I own ! ”

“ You shall be gratified,” the señor said.
“ A wig of flaxen curls upon your head,
And peasant dress of Normandy, will make
You quite unrecognizable to all ;
And your melodious notes may rise and fall,
And deepening thunders of applause may wake,
And none will dream of the sweet singer’s name,
Where she abides, or from what place she came.”

* * * * *

The “ Chimes of Normandy ” was played that
night—

An oft-sung opera, but never trite.
The señor introduced in it a song,
Which to that opera does not belong—
A peasant flower-girl the character,
And Florecita personated her.

A country scene, the maiden hunting flowers,
And singing while she plucked them, gave
Her ample scope to show her brilliant powers.

At her first note, as silent as the grave
The audience became, and every ear
Bent forward eagerly, each one to hear.

Her tones first fluttered, then began to swell and
Rose in the lark-song, loud and clear,
As high and higher soared the bird on air !
Then, sinking to a breathless whisper, fell
As if the song were lost in upper space—

Dying so softly, none could name the place
Where ceased the notes.

As if beneath a spell,
The awe-struck people sat, in silence, there,
A full half-minute. Then arose a shout
So long and loud that none could feel a doubt
That Florecita's triumph was complete !

A wealth of bloom was showered at her feet.
She had no need of other flow'rs to pull,
The bouquets filled her basket more than full.

CHAPTER IX.

FLORECITA TO PAUL.

“Dear Paul,

“My lover’s voice I hear,
And fame and wealth are waiting near—
I go to meet them—leaving you.
Start not. My act has naught of shame.
Ambition—music is his name—
The first great love, my life e’er knew.

“How dear to me you are, God knows!
My wayward soul out to you goes,
Yearning within your arms to be;
But, oh! ambition steps between,
And pictures such a glowing scene—
A laurel wreath awaiting me!

“A singing-bird, you should not cage!
(Alas! my tears fall on this page!)
Its longing heart may be most true;
But it will ever pine to soar,
And, when it sees an open door,
Will bid its narrow home adieu.

“I go, because such is my fate.
But, if you love me, darling, wait,

And from all doubts your spirit rest.
I shall return to you some day,
World-weary, and content to lay
My aching head upon your breast.

“Till then, farewell. Oh! not a night
Shall shut the world out from my sight,
But I shall low on bended knee,
Breathe forth to God an earnest prayer
To save from sickness, grief and care
The one who waits at home for me.

“Unknown, with Schira’s troupe, I sang
At home, and loud my praises rang.
With him I go, with one regret,
And that, dear Paul, is leaving you ;
But oh! believe me ever true
And still

“Your loving,
‘ Floweret.’

No more than that. Paul’s home was desolate,
Another blow dealt by the hand of Fate !

His uncle Lloyd had failed. It was to save
Some of his money, when misfortune’s wave
Swept over him, that he had sought Le Clair.

But only gloom and ruin met him there.
Ill was his aunt, and ill was proud Lenore.
His uncle’s face no welcome greeting wore,

Beset by people who had lost their all,
The latter scarcely seemed to notice Paul,
Who, unsuccessful, shortly home returned,
When of the second blow too soon he learned.

His Florecita gone to win renown
In the great world so filled with sin and pride !
How his financial losses dwindled down
To nothingness, this greater loss beside !

And then he passed into an angry mood
As there, her life and his were both reviewed.
He had been kind to her—too kind, he thought,
Had gratified her whims. She had been taught
In everything to which her mind could reach—
In music, painting, purity of speech;
In the small world, he made her—reigned a queen
(By right of genius, though, as has been seen).
And yet she called that little world a cage,
And longed to step upon a public stage !

Sad, sad, was Paul. Both sad and angry too.
On Florecita all the blame he threw.

Self-justified as men are apt to be,
The matter's other side he could not see.

A wound that makes us angry, is half cured,
And all its smarts and pains may be endured.
The blow that falls and crushes hope or life,
Within the bosom makes no thought of strife.

In that mad moment Paul caught up his pen,
And wrote a cruel message there and then :

“ You have chosen your way, and henceforth
you are free !

Think alone of yourself. Quite assured you may
be,

I may suffer awhile but my heart will not break ;
And I love you too little, to wait for your sake,
Till the world shall dethrone you, and, weary,
you flee

From its wrath to a rest and a refuge in me !

By this act of your life you have forfeited all.

Go your way and forget, as will do

Your wronged

Paul.”

CHAPTER X.

CLAIRE TO PAUL.

“ Dear Cousin :

“ I received your welcome letter,
And take this early moment to reply.
You have been ill—I trust that you are better,
And that the clouds are rolling from your sky.

“ All may be borne—life’s many cares and
crosses,
If we take up the burden of each day
With willing spirit, and repair our losses
By mending them as soon and best we may.

“ Our uncle’s failure brought you loss of money,
But you inform me that the loss is small ;
Then you are young, your pathway still is sunny,
And energy may yet retrieve it all.

“ And Florecita—if you really love her
Fly to her side, and while she wins her name,
Throw your strong manly arm about, above her,
And shield her from the storms that follow
fame.

“ Dear Paul, you have not done by her your duty.
(Forgive me. If I wound, it is to heal).

With genius, such as hers, ambition, beauty,
To hide her from the world, is but to steal

“From it, a part of its own true belonging ;
Hiding the idol from its worshiper.
And you are all your better nature wronging,
When you condemn and turn away from her.

“A rare, sweet song-bird ! O, I pray you take her
And hold her to your noble, manly heart !
Yet leave her free to soar, at will, and make her
Each aspiration, of your life a part !

“Papa and I had sad, sad news, this morning :
A letter, from Aunt Ruth, says that Lenore
Has gone insane ! One night, without a warning
She, screaming, rushed out through an open
door,

“And swift as any deer, went wildly flying,
Barefoot and night-robed, through a pelting
rain,
Bearing a money-box, which she was trying
To hide, as on she went a-down the lane.

“And, now, she thinks she is a queen. Her
bearing
Is still more haughty, arrogant and proud,
Then at the time, when you and I were sharing
A welcome that your wife was not allowed.

“ And what of Claire ? I think I hear you asking,
Whose father in the failure *lost his all* ?
Well, each and all of us as are daily tasking
Ourselves, some of our comforts to recall.

“ My father has a clerkship. I am keeping
The house, and also teaching school.
We have no time for play, nor much for sleep-
ing,
For we rise very early as a rule.

“ My little brothers, John and Ned, are selling
The daily morning papers on the street—
I have till nine to tidy up our dwelling,
And cook the little that we have to eat.

“ If I had Florecita’s rare, sweet talent,
A better fate would soon be ours to own ;
And dear papa, I know, would be too gallant
To let his daughter meet the world alone.

“ But I have not ; and so must keep on striving
To use the meagre gifts I do possess,
To such an end that I shall be a-driving
Dull care away and wooing happiness.

“ Though we are poor, we are not sad or lonely,
For honest toil has many joys in store ;
And I thank God, to-day, that I am only
My father’s daughter Claire, and not Lenore.

“ But if I had no father and no brother,
And I to suit my taste might shape my life,
Changing my lowly self into some other,
I’d be the song-bird whom you call your wife..

“ And if you tried my eager wings to fetter,
Like her, to flee my bondage I would dare.
But since it may not be, I close this letter,
By signing it,

 Your loving cousin,
 Claire.”

CHAPTER XI.

PAUL TO CLAIRE.

“ Dearest Claire :

“ Your advice struck my heart like a knife,
And I went to New York on search for my wife,
But to find she had sailed on the 19th of May,
On the steamer ‘Gazelle,’ for some land far away.
To what point she was destined, it could not be
learned.

“ And so to my desolate home I returned,
To wait for some message from over the sea,
That would furnish a clue of my song-bird to me.
I was sure she would write, though my
letter was cold

And cruel as death, for her heart was pure gold.

“ But, alas ! what a sorrow delaying has cost !
The ‘Gazelle’ has gone down—every soul has
been lost !

And my song-bird of Heaven sleeps under the
wave,

Where no tear drops of mine can be shed on her
grave !

Ah ! I realize fully, that not as her mate,
Can I ask for admittance at Heaven’s bright
gate !

“But, alas! that she went to the depths of the
sea,
And yet took to her rest, no forgiveness from me!
O, to know I was wrong, yet acknowledged
no sin,
And to weep for the joy that my own might
have been,
Except for the fatal dominion of pride,
Which fettered my bird, till, escaping, she died—
Is a punishment greater than I can well bear!
“Too sad to reflect and too hopeless for prayer,
Since the past can be mine never-more to recall;
I remain in deep woe,

“Your unfortunate,

“Paul.”

CHAPTER XII.

CLAIRE TO PAUL.

“ Paul, my Cousin :

“ It is long

Since you sent a scratch of pen.
Fearing something may be wrong,
I now write to you again.

“ We will have a wedding soon !

Do you by my words abide ?
On the thirtieth of June,
Papa takes another bride !

“ He has won a noble heart—

She is rich and young and fair !
Mine were not a daughter's part
Did my face no pleasure wear,

“ For the joy that lights his own ;

And his better, happier lot.
Yet I feel so much alone—
I am selfish, am I not ?

“ He so long has looked to me,

And from me has comfort drawn—
Like Othello, I shall be
With my occupation gone !

“ Yet, so selfish is my soul,
That were I to be a wife,
I should wish to claim the whole
Of my husband’s heart and life—

“ In his soul would make a shrine
With but one high priestess there!
E’er to keep the fires were mine,
And the priestess should be Claire.

“ So, to her, I give him up,
Who has been to me my all!
Come and cheer me, while I sup
Of the bitter draught, dear Paul.

“ They have bidden me invite
You to see their happiness;
And although with tears I write,
I would have it be no less.

“ They are in each other lost—
They find sunshine everywhere!
I am lone and tempest-tossed,
Come—if but to comfort
Claire.”

A rare, sweet gladness leaped to Paul’s blue
eyes,
And all his being thrilled with new delight.
As on him flashed the truth, he felt surprise

That it so long was hidden from his sight.

“Ah! now I know,” he mused, “who lit the
flame

And whence my soul’s high priestess came!
For since my boyhood days, she has been there,
Veiled and unknown, but still my priestess,
Claire!

“She loves me, too! How plain it all is now—
The love-lit eyes, the pure and thoughtful brow,
And noble soul! With what unselfishness,
She labors—other lives than hers to bless,
Crushing her heart beneath her feet, that she
An instrument of happiness may be!

“At last I am awake! To her I fly,
In answer to her spirit’s longing cry!
And tempest-tossed, no more, her bark shall be—
A quiet haven it shall find in me.”

CHAPTER XIII.

How the ones, that we love, drop away from our
lives,

As the beautiful flowers die !

But, thank God ! some sweet blossom springs
upward, and thrives

In the soil where their ashes lie !

One by one, do they silently wither away

And in darkness, we mourn for our dead,

Never thinking the clouds will be lifted some
day,

And that others will bloom in their stead !

Never thinking the sun of to-morrow will be

Just as bright as the sun of the past,

And the beauty, next summer, of flower and tree

None the less for the winter's cold blast.

How unwise, if a blossom, we cherish, should fade,

To believe that all beauty is gone ;

Or when darkness is brooding o'er hill and in
glade,

To deny that a morning must dawn !

How unwise when a loved one is false to his vow,

Or a treasure is taken above,

To declare with a shadow of woe on the brow,
That on earth we have nothing to love !

True, the things that we love, drop away from
our lives

As the beautiful flowers die,
But, thank God ! some sweet blossom springs
upward, and thrives
In the soil where their ashes lie !

Paul closed the book. The poem woke the
thought
That time to him had consolation brought ;
For, though he still remembered with regret
The form and face of his lost floweret,
The night of gloom had surely passed away
And he was basking in the light of day,
Another flower blooming in the stead
Of her, now two years numbered with the dead.

His other flower, sweet, and pure, and fair,
Loved as he ne'er before had loved, was Claire—
The girl who took life's burdens bravely up
And sipped with smiling lips of sorrow's cup ;
Who did her duty nobly, faltered not,
Nor yet repined when toil became her lot ;
A priestess at home's altar, where the light
Shone with a steady lustre, day and night.
Less gifted than Paul's former love in song,
She yet would work and sing the whole day long.

Her guileless heart knew naught of pride or
strife.

Her touch woke things of beauty into life,
Her warmth-bestowing smile was like the sun—
Its light was shed on all she looked upon.

Paul was her hero in her childhood days,
She thought of him and named him in her plays
As one who stood above all other men.
In girlhood hours she dreamed the dream again!
Then saw him vanish quickly from her life,
Herself unsought, another made his wife,
Yet bravely did she take the heavy cross,
And none imagined how she felt the loss.
She consolation found in noble deeds—
In ministering to other creatures' needs.
She made her love a place so hid with bloom
That none imagined it to be a tomb.

And Paul—in Florecita's love, his soul
Was ever longing. She filled not the whole.
There was an aching void where jealous thought
Roamed as it willed—unchecked, untaught.
His bird—she was, indeed, a bird, poor thing!—
Had upward looked—had beat a restless wing
'Gainst prison bars, and longed to soar and sing!
And though she kissed the hand that cared for
her,

Her love for him could not her flight deter.
She loved but pined! Erratic child of song!
Alas! she did not to his race belong.

She had no pow'r to quench the living fire
That turned her longing glances high'r
Than the sweet glade wherein with Paul she
dwelt,

And yet a wife's devotion for him felt.

Into a dream the past had faded now !
Only a memory, his love and vow !
Though self-reproach would not be wholly stilled,
He loved another, who his being filled !
And often did his musing spirit cry,
“ To part from noble Claire, would be to die ! ”

A year it had been thus, and now 'twas May,
The third since Florecita went away ;
To-morrow's sun would light his wedding-day,
And on Claire Markham, his sweet bride would
shine,

A blessed gift, a joy almost divine !

He took his hat and, smiling, left his room.
Outside a host of flowers were in bloom,
And all the air was laden with perfume.
Once more and only once to call on Claire
Before his own proud name was hers to wear.

She met him at the door, her face a-light
With happiness that filled her soul that night—
The very last in that sweet blooming May.
(Alas ! for them it could not longer stay !)

“ Will Heav'n e'er be nearer ? ” whispered she.

“Yes, darling mine, to-morrow.” answered he.

They wandered down a path, beneath the moon
Again uprising full to welcome June.

All nature seemed to thrill with happiness,
As hand touched hand in loving, mute caress.
Up in the leafy trees, the song-birds woke.
Their thrilling notes the dreamy silence broke.
O, never was the sky so brightly blue,
Nor half as many brilliant stars looked through,
Nor breezes blew so softly—thought the two.

They reached a purling stream, whose waters
glowed

Like molten silver as they onward flowed,
Singing a melody of wordless rhyme,
To which the lovers’ happy hearts kept time ;
While all the flowers nodded to the breeze,
As if to say, “What loving souls are these !”

They laid their plans for future, while they
walked

Beside the stream ; and of their home they talked.
The spot the song-bird called a cage while there,
Seemed Heav’n to less ambitious Claire.

She had a picture of it in her mind,
As it would be, when her own hands had twined
Sweet roses through the lattice at the door,
And she the queenly robes of wifhood wore.

And Paul could see her by the garden gate
At times, when business would detain him late,

With dewy, love-lit eyes, in wait
For his return ; and, later, he could see
His darling, while she, smiling, poured the tea.
Time passed, unmarked. The parting came
too soon,
Although the breezes whispered "It is June!"
Although the watch-hands showed the wedding
day
Had surely come. He tore himself away
From Claire with something of regret,
That there were several hours of waiting yet.
Before she went to rest, the happy Claire
Shook out and brushed her long and shining hair,
Then viewed her bridal robes and kissed them
all ;
And with each kiss she whispered : " Paul, dear
Paul !"
Alas ! she did not see the shadow f. ll.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FOREIGN letter came to Paul, next morn,
Crushing to earth the joy so lately born.
A servant brought it, ere he left his bed.
He knew the hand, and here is what he read :

“ My Love :

“ Once more I call you so,
Although you never may bestow
A thought upon your little flower,
Who, rescued from a watery tomb,
For two long years, has been in bloom
Within a foreign bower.

“ I did not write—oh ! I could not !
Your letter would not be forgot !

The cruel words were ever ringing
Within my ears, both night and day,
And saddened every happy lay
My eager voice was singing.

“ Amid the courts I soon had fame
And there immortalized a name—

Not mine ! I did not wish to shame you
By dragging yours upon the stage,
Since you forbade it in a rage,
And asked if I could blame you !

“ But bitter sorrow I have had,
Until I am both sick and sad ;
And joy can come again—oh ! never.
Just when I loudest praises woke,
My voice, all of a sudden, broke,
And it is lost forever !

“ Sick, hopeless, in a foreign clime,
And growing old before my time—
Almost to fatal madness driven,
I turn to him whose ‘ love is true
And steadfast as the skies of blue,’
And ask to be forgiven.

“ True to my vows I e’er have been.
I have not wandered into sin,
Nor have I yielded to temptation
And not a single blot, or blur,
Has touched my name or character
To make me lose my station.

“ And I have realized, dear Paul,
How far true love outweighs the all
Of gilded fame and cold ambition ;
And grieve I could not shape my life
To take the duties of a wife,
And, cheerful, fill her mission.

“ I ask to be forgiven ?—why ?
Because I shall return to die !

Return, my love, if you will let me ;
But if I am no longer dear,
A spot to rest awaits me here,
Where no one will regret me.

“ I feel the chilling blight of death,
And soon must go, so reason saith.
All that I ask—oh ! do not doubt me !—
Is, with my head upon your breast,
To sink into a dreamless rest,
Your loving arms about me.

“ A word from you I will obey—
If it be ‘ come,’ if it be ‘ stay,’
For either is my promise binding.
Perhaps, new love has come to you !—
Then I will disappear from view,
Beyond all chance of finding.

“ What is a fruitless life, like mine,
On which the sun has ceased to shine,
And o’er which death doth surely hover,
That I should blight the sweet young life
Of one that you would call your wife,
And who now names you ‘ lover’ ?

“ Yet at the thought, my heart grows cold,
And I feel strangely cramped and old,
And in the warming sunlight shiver,

As one will do, at sudden fall,
From overhanging tree or wall,
 Into an icy river.

“ Impatient, ill, I wait to hear
A word from you ; with no one near,
 Except my foreign maid Juanita ;
I wait, in hope, that we may meet,
And that your reaching arms will greet
 “ Your loving
 “ Florecita.”

CHAPTER XV.

ALAS ! The agony, the dark despair,
That filled Paul Markham's soul. Could he tell
Claire—

The sweet young creature, waiting even then
To breathe the vows of deathless love again,
Those vows that he so willingly had shared ?

Already was the marriage feast prepared.
Already was her dwelling wreathed in bloom !
How could he shadow it and her in gloom ?
How could he take the gladness from her breast,
And send her forth, where she would find no rest
Or peace of mind while weary life should last ?
And how, great God, could he, who loved her,
cast

The cup of water from his parching lips,
And seek the desert, ere a taste he sips ?
How live through dreary days to come and go,
And her sweet love and counsel not to know ?

He loved and mourned his Florecita, dead :
Alive, he almost hated her instead !

What right had she who cast his love aside
As worthless, weighed with fame and pride,
Who let him think till now that she had died—
What right had she to crush his happiness ?
And, oh ! how dared she his forgiveness ask ?

His soul recoiled at thought of her caress —
Her, in whose glances he had loved to bask !

Strange, changing world ! O, solve all ye who
can,

The problem of the fickle love of man !

Five years ago, his life was filled with her,
And he had called himself her humble worshiper.
Now all his soul was wrapped in gentle Claire,
And thoughts of Florecita brought despair,
Blank, dark and bridgeless ! Death he would
prefer

With Claire, to life and all its joys with her !

He sprang from bed—then sank into a chair
With wordless moan and cry. Temptation came
That pointed out the scandal and the shame
For him and Claire, unless he chose to say
To Florecita in a letter—“ stay,”

Or by his silence word from her deny.

Why not secure his happiness—oh ! why ?

Then better feelings came. Claire should
decide,

And he by her decision would abide.

He dressed and went into the open air
With full intent to tell the whole to Claire.

But, as he paused beside the garden wall,
Behind some bushes, which were thick and tall,
He saw her flitting in and out the bowers,
And heard her singing, while she wreathed the
flowers :

“ Take my head upon thy breast,
It were Heaven, there to rest,
Free from all the cares of life,
With its wrangles and its strife;
Sheltered safely in thy love—
Is there greater bliss above?

“ Let me nestle close to thee,
While the happy moments flee,
Whisper, darling, in my ear
Words of hope and words of cheer!
Not to taste a monarch's cup
Would I give this sweetness up.

“ Take my head upon thy breast!
I would make thee richly blest;
From thy brow would chase each care
That might cast a shadow there.
I in faithfulness would prove
Thee the depths of woman's love.

“ Take my head upon thy breast!
Like a bird, lost from its nest,
I have fluttered, love, to thee.
Wilt thou guard and shelter me?
In thy loving close embrace
Let me find a resting place.

“ Though the world be cold and drear,
I find warmth and brightness here!

Here is love and here is joy !
Here is peace without alloy !
Living, dying, let me rest,
In thy arms and on thy breast !”

Paul heard each sentence of the loving song,
And marked the happiness her features wore.
He wavered, faltered—was no longer strong ;
But listened to temptation’s voice once more.

Retreating softly, he the letter tore
Into a mass of fragments—gave them to the
breeze,
That quickly scattered them beneath the trees.

The deed was done. He could not show to
Claire

The sad epistle which had brought despair
To him ; nor tell her, since the proof was gone.
Her dream of happiness should be lived on
Till came for her the sad awakening,
And all the woe that it would surely bring.

Since of the letter not a soul would know,
He need not bear the blame of such a blow,
And it might never fall—might she not die,
Who was so sad and ill, and leave no sign
That would expose her husband’s living lie ?

And so the star of duty ceased to shine
Upon his path ; and he allied himself with sin,
That he Claire’s happiness and his might win.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE vows were said. A priest pronounced
them wed

And asked a blessing on each low bowed head ;
Then, as they passed out of the church's door,
A band of merry girls went on before,
And strewed their path with blossoms—all pure
white,

An emblem that life's journey would be bright,
And from all thorns and rugged places free,
As their fond love had pictured it would be.

Vain hope. Paul's bride was loving, sweet,
and fair.

And did the honors of his home with grace ;
But, ever hov'ring near his darling's chair,
He seemed to see the other's pleading face,
And, in the night, imagined that her cry
Rose clear above the east-wind's mournful sigh,

“Come to me, Paul—dear Paul, before I die !”

Nervous and sad he grew as weeks went by,
And Claire's bright eyes were often dimmed
with tears.

Her Paul had changed, she knew not how or why,
And she was racked with many anxious fears.
Sometimes he pressed her wildly to his heart,
And said to lose her would be woe indeed ;

And, then, he seemed to walk from her apart,
As if her loving care he did not need.
So changeable, so full of whims, he grew,
That on her life, he many shadows threw.

He did not love her less. His heart was rent
With fear and self-reproach—sin's punishment.
The ghost of his one crime was haunting him—
A shadow, always following, ghastly dim
And Banquo-like, intruding in the light
Of revelry, as well as gloom of night.

Sweet, patient Claire, by loving thought and
care,
Tried to dispel the shadows falling there.
No duty was neglected or forgot ;
And though she suffered much, Paul knew it not.

She met him with a smile—she read, she
played,
And many glad surprises for him made.
Yet, her unselfish love but helped to whet
The edge of self-reproach and keen regret.

Her songs were hushed. For, once, she chanced
to sing
A simple ballad—some sweet little thing
That Florecita sang in days gone by ;
And Paul was angry, though he knew not why.

“ You have no voice ! ” He spoke so rudely
then,
That Claire would never try to sing again.

“ He does not love me ! ” to herself she said,

“ His faithful heart is buried with the dead !
Why did he seek me, feeling thus his loss ?
I was content to bear my heavy cross—
A heavier is on my shoulders now.
Alas ! Could I but free him from his vow ! ”

But she was wrong, Paul loved her madly ; yes,
His crime was to secure her happiness ;
And it was fear for her, his darling Claire,
That brought so much anxiety and care ;
And, ever in his heart, arose the prayer,
“ Save her, O God, who is so true and pure,
And let the criminal Thy wrath endure ! ”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE autumn leaves were crumpled, stiff, and brown,

And from the trees were slowly dropping down.
They lay in little heaps upon the ground,
And oft by eddy winds were whirled around—
Winds whose sad moaning died away in sighs,
All broken-hearted for the sundered ties
Of earth-land and the summer, sweet with
flow'rs,

Which were a-bloom through happy, sunlit hours.

A sort of dreamy sadness came to Claire,
In which her husband had no thought or share.
There was a something in the autumn moan,
In sympathy with her sad spirit's tone.

Paul's punishment fell not on him alone.
His path, though bright or gloomy, was her own.
The cloud of mystery, above his head,
Brought to her soul a keen regret and dread.
Guileless in heart, and knowing not sin's laws,
She thought some failure of her own, the cause
Of Paul's abstraction and the sudden change
From happy love to cold indifference.
Even the outside world remarked as strange,
His altered life ; but he made no defense.
He felt instinctively that only time
Was needed to expose his haunting crime,

And crush the one true heart that worshiped him.
No wonder that his anxious eyes were dim
With unshed tears. He felt he had no right
To drink joy's cup and bask in love's pure light ;
And, hoping to atone, he often turned
From those delights, for which his spirit yearned ;
And loving madly, he yet chilled the life
Of her who thought herself an unloved wife—
Unloved, because she failed in what was real
To be Paul Markham's idolized ideal.

And, thus, though not a bitter word was said,
And of the other's sorrow neither knew,
With every day, the shadows deeper grew
Where they had hoped that sunlight would be
shed.

That autumn day, Paul Markham was not well,
And Claire, with her soft fingers, sought to quell
The piercing pains that darted through his head.
He marked her thoughtfulness, and softly said,
As to his breast he drew her: "Claire, dear
Claire !"

His tones unlocked the flood-gates of her soul,
And losing, for the instant, self-control,
She wept, unchecked, and almost wildly there,
While show'ring kisses on his face and hair.
Paul Markham for the first time realized
How he had crushed the heart he so much prized.
To him the truth came like a flash of light
Into the pitchy darkness of the night,

Giving surrounding objects to the sight.

“My soul’s best love!” he said, “you must not deem

That I am cold to you, though so I seem.

No other love has come into my life

Like that I bear for you, my darling wife!

But woe has weighed me down. This much I tell

To comfort you and drive your doubts away;

I did not treat poor Florecita well—

For if I had, she might be here to-day!

The thought has haunted me, and turned to gall

The cup of happiness ere sipped at all.

Bear yet a little longer. Time will prove

An all-efficient healer; and will move

The shadow from my soul; and, darling, then

We two will know our sweet love-dream again!”

Claire made him no response. She kissed his lips,

His aching head, his hands, and finger-tips!

And Paul, to whom sweet comfort was denied,

Saw that her doubting soul was satisfied.

Soothed by her touches, he soon sank to rest,

And slept until the sun was in the west,

And earth the signs of coming darkness wore.

Alas! he did not dream that never more

Her loving lips would press his aching head;

Nor on his path, her light of love be shed!

That she would never smile on him again—

Else he had slept less long and sweetly then.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WEARIED, at length, Claire drew away from Paul,

With one soft kiss, and went into the hall,
Attracted thither by a sound she heard—
A woman's tone, although it spoke no word.

The light was dim within that inner room,
Which always wore a sort of twilight gloom,
And yet was all-sufficient to descry
The figure of a woman very nigh,
With pale, sad face, black eyes, and dusky hair,
And features pinched, yet beautiful and fair.

Claire gave a gasping sigh and backward reeled,
Knowing full well her own dark doom was
sealed.

The other forward came, a smile most rare,
Lighting her pallid face—a glad surprise
That lent new beauty to her matchless eyes.

“Have you,” she said, “forgotten me, dear
Claire?

I am Paul's wife! We met in days gone by!”

“You are his wife! What then, O God, am I?”

The words were uttered with a gasping cry,
That woke Paul from his slumber, and he sprang
From off his bed, while yet it wildly rang.

But Florecita all unconscious seemed.

That he had wed again she had not dreamed.
To find Claire stopping with her Cousin Paul,
Had in its import nothing strange at all.
Attributing the cry of wild affright,
To her own sudden coming into sight,
She sank upon her knees, low at Paul's feet,
And breathed his name in accents softly sweet.

"My darling Paul, I could no longer wait,
And I am here to learn from you my fate."

He answered not. His thoughts were turned
to Claire,
To whom he offered his support and care,
For she was swaying weakly, to and fro—
A human reed beneath a storm of woe.

She rallied quickly, and refused his aid ;
But he could see the effort that she made.

How calm she grew ! Paul saw her color fade
Until she seemed a marble image in the gloom !
A Nemesis, she stood, to read his doom.

"This is your sin !" she said. "I see it now !
A perjured soul ! O God, a broken vow !
No wonder that you spent your hours alone
In doing penance, that you might atone
For your most wicked wrong to her and me,
Who never dreamed of such base perfidy.
I worshiped you ! and now—Help, help, O God !
How can I pass beneath Thy heavy rod !"

Again a wildness leaped into her eyes
And agony was echoed in her sighs.

"Dear Claire," said Paul, "I know that it is
meet

That you with scorn my punishment complete!
But doubt me not. I thought this woman dead
Until the very day on which we wed;
And then, my darling Claire, it was too late
To change the destiny marked out by fate.
I suffered all alone that I might save
You from my woe's o'erwhelming wave.
By right you are my wife, and I shall claim
In law, for you, that sacred right and name!"

"No, no, dear Paul," the trembling lips were
white;

"I will not rob the other of her right!
I know not why she let us think her dead—"

"Because he bade me," Florecita said,
"To trouble him no more, since forfeited
Were all my claims. Three weeks on deck,
'Mid sun and tempest, of a floating wreck,
Caused me an illness, long and quite severe.
Recovering, I made a grand *debut*
In foreign lands, was feted for a year;
Then lost my voice, and so despondent grew
That I lay down with wish and prayer to die!
But ever in my soul arose the cry
To see and ask forgiveness of my Paul,
Although, I felt, he did not care for me at all.
I wrote a letter; but no answer came!
And, knowing I was wholly in the blame

For his neglect, resolved to cross the sea
And learn just what my sentence was to be.

“But you have married him, and none need
know

That I am still alive ! From here, I go
Unrecognized and silent, as I came !
God knows, I love you both ! no breath of shame
Shall come to you through me. My lips no more
Shall speak your name or that my father bore.
I, in obscurity, will live and die ! ”

She, breathless, paused, choked by a gasping
sigh.

But Claire replied :

“You point my duty out to me,
And I, O God ! will not less noble be !
This is your home. I have no right or claim
To it, or even to your husband’s name.
Take back your own ! I am the one to go ! ”

Paul interrupted :

“Claire, my darling, no !
The facts disclosed, the law will give release,
And you and I may dwell in love and peace.”

She did not seem to hear him. To her heart,
With agonizing cry, she placed her hand ;
Then reeled and tottered, lacking strength to
stand,

Much less to say to both “farewell,” and part.

At last, she, gasping, sank into a chair,

And let her head drop low upon her breast.

Paul sprang to raise her, crying :

“ Claire ! dear Claire ! ”

The storm was past, the faithful soul at rest !
The still, limp form resisted not, for gone
From earthly darkness into Heaven's dawn
Was she, the pure, the brave, the noble Claire,
Whose loving heart had broken then and there !

“ Dead ! dead ! my love ! my own true darling,
dead !

And you and I alive ! ” Paul hoarsely said.

“ It cannot be. A life, so nigh divine,
Were worth a thousand of your own and mine.
How can I shield her memory from shame ! ”

Then Florecita spoke, with tearful eyes,
Into whose depths he saw her soul arise :

“ For her sweet sake, I will relinquish name,
And home, departing even as I came,
Unknown, unseen ; and thus her grave may bear
Without reproach, ‘ Paul Markham's consort,
Claire.’

And still beneath the waters of the sea
The wayward Florecita's tomb shall be !
Forever more, farewell ! ”

She turned away.

“ The sacrifice,” said Paul, “ is useless—stay ! ”

But she was gone already from his sight—
Had vanished 'mid the gath'ring gloom of night,
Leaving no trace of when she came or went,

Or who she was, or where her steps were bent.

Paul mourned her not. Filled with the loss
of Claire

In any other thought he had no share.

For long and silent hours he held his dead

In dumb, cold agony of heart and head ;

And was but dimly conscious of what followed
next—

The inquest in the morn, the preacher's text,

And all the busy people, moving, here and there,

Talking and weeping o'er his gentle Claire.

"She died of heart disease," the doctors said,

"Caused by some shock of woe, or sudden dread."

But not a sign of struggle marked her face.

Wrapped in her bridal veil of costly lace,

And wreathed with snowy orange flow'r's, she lay

So sweet and peaceful on her couch of bloom

That none could think her soul had passed away,

And that the casket waited for the tomb.

Paul took her to her own sweet land of flow'rs,

Where they had spent so many blissful hours,

And which she left a blooming, happy bride—

There made a grave, close by her mother's side,

Beneath the shadow of a live-oak tree,

Where dwelt the birds that she had loved the
best ;

And while their notes were ringing glad and free,

Amid the sunlight, laid her down to rest.

A marble angel, with her own, sweet face,

One hand uplifted, marks the resting-place ;
The fingers of the other grasp a scroll,
Which, hanging, by its weight, seems to unroll.
Only a few sad words are written there :
“ Gone Heavenward—Our darling, Claire.”

CHAPTER XIX.

No more to Alton's hills did Paul return,
And they who loved him failed to learn
Much of his roving life for many years,
And great anxiety of mind was theirs.

A wanderer in foreign lands, in vain
He sought to banish self-reproach's pain,
By constant change of place. His friends were
few,

And they of his affairs but little knew.
Sad, silent, taciturn, inviting not
Their sympathy, he soon was quite forgot;
And each day found him more and more alone,
With his own selfish grief, whose smothered moan
Was not an instant absent from his breast,
But even shaped his dreams, when he sought
rest.

'Twas tented by the Arno, that he dreamed,
Or saw, for real, indeed, the vision seemed,
While he was seeking sleep, his angel Claire,
Who came close to his side and smoothed his hair,
With hands whose magnetism in their touch
Soothed his poor, longing spirit—oh! so much!
“My love,” she said, “’tis wrong to mourn me
so.

The other waits for you. I pray you go

And seek her in the place where first she sang
The song that wooed you, while in air it rang ;
And you will find her there. Take to your breast
The lonely, longing child. I am at rest—
Or would be, if your tears and sighs could cease,
And in your soul were dwelling joy and peace.”

She spoke, and vanished into silent air,
Before his lips could frame the words, “Dear
Claire !”

That rose to them and softly trembled there.

Then with a start, he woke, but all the gloom
Of night had vanished from his tented room.
A fading light was there, and sweet perfume,
And up the path she went, a trailing gleam,
Which showed the vision was not all a dream.

With sudden bound, Paul stood without the
door,

But saw the white-robed form of Claire no more.

“Lost ! Lost again !” To earth he sank in
tears

Such as the ones he shed in childhood years—
Wept like an infant—without self-control ;
And yet they brought relief to his worn soul.

He would abide the prayer ; and if he found
Poor Florecita on her native ground,
Then he would surely know, ’twas Claire that
came—

And would restore his wife to home and name.

CHAPTER XX.

PAUL stood beside the old *adobe* cot,
Whose queer belongings were forgotten not.
Again it was December ; but the day
Was warm, and children fanned themselves at
play.

He stood beneath an oleander tree,
Where, all unnoticed, he could hear and see
What passed within the cot. His wife was there !
And so he knew the messenger was Claire,
Who came to him upon the Arno's bank that
night,

With pure, pale face and robes of spotless white !

In Spanish peasant dress, beside a stand,
She sat, a waxen image in her hand,
Which she was moulding, so it seemed like life.
In want and toiling ! Yet Paul Markham's wife !

But, ah ! she was not seated then alone.
Paul knew the other by his mien and tone.

The wretch, Don Carlos, standing by her side,
Again was pleading for the love denied
In years gone by, when Paul had claimed a bride.

" Why toil like this ? " the Don was heard to
say,

" Come to my arms, and toss that wax away !
Joy, wealth, and pleasure but await your word.

Rest on my breast, my own sweet singing bird.
The man who won you surely loves you not,
Else why alone with this unhappy lot?
Be mine and show him that he is forgot ! ”

She bent her head. A tear rolled down her
cheek,
Which showed that she was weary, worn, and
weak ;

Then waited full a minute, ere she made reply :

“ Be merciful, Sir Don, and let me die
Unstained by sin and an unholy love,
That I may clasp my mother’s hand above
Without the thought that I have done a wrong,
Save that my soul exulted in its song.
My husband loves me not, and what is worse,
Considers I have been to him a curse !
And yet to lay my head upon his breast
And, for one instant, feel a perfect rest—
To hear him once more call me ‘ darling wife ! ’
I would, the next, lay down my weary life.”

And as she raised her pure, pale, pleading face,
Both men the lines of suffering could trace.

How faithful was her love, and how sublime !
Paul felt his being thrill as in the olden time.

“ ’Tis useless,” said the Don, “ to strive with
fate.

I swear you shall be mine, though, soon or late.
If you deny my wish, your work shall cease,
And want and misery for you increase,

Till you are fain to come on bended knee,
And ask acceptance of yourself from me."

"Liar and fiend!" Paul cried, and quickly
strode

Across the threshold of his wife's abode.

"If I were lightning I would strike you dumb,
Before such words from your base lips should
come!

Breathe but another insult, and your life
Shall pay the penalty of your foul deed!
I have returned. I will protect my wife
And give her ample means for every need."

All trembling, Florecita sat, with eyes
Tear-filled, yet lighted with a glad surprise,
And mingling fear and joy, her features wore.

The Don retreated, but he loudly swore—
Cursing both Paul and Florecita too,
As in chagrin he finally withdrew.

Then Paul turned to his wife. "Come, darling, rest

For evermore," he said, "upon this breast,
And let me shield and keep you from all harm!"

He took the waxen image from her hand,
And placed it very gently on the stand;
Then drew her to him with his strong right arm.

She on his shoulder dropped her weary head.

"Great God, be thanked for this sweet hour!"

she said;

"And since my prayer is granted, Father, I

Am ready to redeem my vow, and die !”

“ Nay, darling wife, we now have learned to live,

And both of us have much we must forgive
Ere we begin anew,” responded Paul.

“ But each of us shall be the other’s all,
And Heav’n wait for both of us, at last,
When all the woes and joys of life are past.
Henceforth your happiness shall be my care,
And selfish love no more my soul shall bear,
Your life shall be a song, and mine a prayer !”

Then Florecita raised her love-lit eyes
Still glowing with the light of glad surprise,
And softly said : “ I would not now recall,
One moment of the bitter past, dear Paul !
This holy pleasure compensates for all !”

CHAPTER XXI.

A QUIET dwelling near the ocean strand
And on the western borders of our land,
Where moaning billows wash the yellow sand.

Outside are climbing vines and blooming
bowers

And such a wilderness of fragrant flowers !

Within, an air of cheerfulness and light ;
A fair young woman in a robe of white,
With two sweet children prattling at her knees—
Such is the picture that Paul Markham sees.

Upon a shelf, protected by a case,
A pretty waxen image has a place.
It is the one she moulded on that morn,
When Paul's sweet, second love for her was born.

Her higher notes are lost, but still she sings,
As do the nestling birds, while yet their wings
Are growing for a flight above the trees—
Soft, low, melodious strains that still
Have power her hearers' every nerve to thrill.

And not alone at home her notes are heard.
The people call her yet, " the singing bird " ;
And not a fête or concert can occur,
That does not find its leading star in her.

But, at her home, she shines with purest light.
There, little e'er is known of sorrow's night.

The clouds of doubt and selfishness are gone.
They disappeared upon the golden dawn
Of that new day of holy love and peace,
That only with life's setting sun shall cease.

 Their lives are wrapped up in their children,
 who
Are loving, and obedient, and bright ;
And tenderly their parents' love requite.

 The boy, who has his mother's eyes and hair,
Has something of her rare, sweet genius, too ;
And he is Florecita's pride and care.

 Paul loves the girl the best. Her eyes are
 blue,
Wistful, and dreamy, and her name is Claire.

THE END.

Extract from an Autograph Letter.

A REVIEW OF BELLA FRENCH SWISHER'S
"ROCKS AND SHOALS,"

By Hon. Richard B. Hubbard,

Ex-Governor of Texas and recent U. S. Minister to Japan.

"ROCKS AND SHOALS," G. W. Dillingham, Publisher, New York.—I have read the romance with much interest—both on the author's own account, and because of the subject matter of the book and the life-like characters who pass before the reader on the mimic stage of action.

The story shows a fine ability and is earnestly and carefully written, while the characters are drawn with a true insight to human nature. The heroine is one whom

"Unmerciful disaster

Follows fast and follows faster,"

and her trials are such as would make a misanthrope of any nature less nicely balanced than hers. Yet her strict adherence to the thorny paths of duty can but be commended. Her

ROCKS AND SHOALS.

father is remarkably unfortunate ; her mother, finally, an invalid ; her friends are faithless ; the girl who has been her companion from infancy, when left a waif at her home, and upon whom she lavishes her heart's devotion as upon a dearly loved sister, only grows up to rival in heartlessness the lover who is induced by her entreaties to prove false to the one who has cherished her. Yet the heroine steadily pursues her way and escapes, with slight bruises, the rocks against which inferior natures would be dashed to pieces.

Our experience teaches us that while sunshine and peaceful waters are most attractive to sailors who go out on the seas, yet there are to be met in the " pathway of the deep," storms and tempests, rocks and shoals, which test the strength of men and ships whether outward or homeward bound.

And such is life—and truthfully has this author sketched the picture, though the scenes are sometimes gloomy. I congratulate her on the plot and the style of the romance. Its MORAL is high. I only hope that the *success* of " Rocks and Shoals " will be *equal* to its MERITS.

RICHARD B. HUBBARD.







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